Stakeholder Research Report
March 2025

INTRODUCTION

This survey was conducted to ensure that the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and its Branches are meeting the needs, priorities, and voices of its members and the broader social work community.

Undertaken by Strategic Membership Solutions (SMS), it drew upon 3,034 responses from qualified social workers, students, and those practising without formal qualifications, offering a robust snapshot of how the AASW's activities align with the profession's evolving needs - and the vital role branches can play in supporting them.

By examining core areas such as advocacy, professional recognition, and branch engagement, this report provides actionable insights to guide AASW decision-making.

The findings serve as a practical tool to help the association strengthen its capacity to effectively represent and support social workers across Australia, ensuring the profession continues to thrive and evolve in response to emerging challenges.

AASW generated 3034 responses via a variety of channels. Each channel used a unique link to enable the effectiveness of each to be measured.

The data highlights that email is by far the most effective channel for engagement, generating over 87% of survey responses. Member emails had a higher response rate (9.21%) than non-member emails (7.84%), but non-member outreach still brought in the largest number of responses (1,452), demonstrating strong engagement beyond the existing membership base.

The Insider Newsletter performed moderately well (364 responses, 2.84% response rate), while the CPD Training Newsletter (0.04%) and website (0.04%) were largely ineffective, indicating that passive content alone does not drive action.

Despite large audiences, social media and the Community Hub failed to generate any survey responses, underscoring a disconnect between reach and engagement. While platforms like LinkedIn (32,000 audience) and Facebook (27,000) provide visibility, they are not converting followers into active participants.

This suggests that direct communication methods like email are the most reliable, while social and passive channels require a more interactive and strategic approach to drive meaningful engagement.

Channel	Recipients / Audience	Respondents Generated	Response Rate	% of Overall Respondents
Non member email	18,515	1452	7.84%	47.86%
Member email	13,020	1199	9.21%	39.52%
Insider newsletter	12,800	364	2.84%	12.00%
CPD Training newsletter	31,000	13	0.04%	0.43%
Website	15,000 visitors over 2 weeks survey open	6	0.04%	0.20%
LinkedIn	32,000	0	0.00%	0.00%
Facebook	27,000	0	0.00%	0.00%
Community Hub	13,520	0	0.00%	0.00%
Melbourne Youth Workers & Social Workers Facebook Group	5,000	0	0.00%	0.00%
X	4,500	0	0.00%	0.00%
Social Workers in Australia Facebook Group	3,000	0	0.00%	0.00%
TOTAL		3034		

Key Insights

Respondent Snapshot

- **Status**: Of the 3,034 people surveyed, 87% are qualified social workers and 8% are currently studying, while a small group practise social work without formal qualifications.

- **Role**: Among those actively working in the field (2,411 respondents), most (65%) provide direct client services, and a notable 22% hold leadership or management roles.

- **Work Setting:** Of the 2,387 respondents, 31% work in private practice or are self-employed, 30% in not-for-profits, and 26% for state or territory government, illustrating the profession's broad reach.

- **Credentials:** Among 2,486 surveyed for credentials, 53% hold the Accredited Social Worker credential and 22% have a Mental Health accreditation, while 36% report no additional credentials.

- **Practice Areas:** The survey data shows a broad range of practice areas within social work. Mental health (50%), counselling (39%), clinical social work (25%), and child/family support (25%) are the most common specialisations.

- **Experience:** Respondents feature a healthy spread of experience levels: nearly a quarter have fewer than five years in the field, another fifth between five and ten, and the rest split among mid-career to veteran practitioners.

- **State**: Respondents are geographically diverse, with the largest groups based in Victoria (28%), New South Wales (21%), and Queensland (19%).

- **Location**: Most (58%) live in metropolitan areas, while 31% are in regional locations and 9% in rural or remote settings.

- **Age:** Respondents span a broad age range, with the largest cohorts in the 40–49 (25%) and 50–59 (23%) brackets, reflecting a solid representation of mid-career professionals.

- **Gender:** Women predominate (79.7%), consistent with broader social work demographics.

- **Background:** Culturally, 20% identify as CALD, 3% as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and 13% speak a language other than English at home.

- **Membership Status**: 64% of respondents are current AASW members, with 39% having been members for more than five years and 25% for less. 18% have never joined.

- **Membership Type**: Among members, 68% hold Full Membership, 15% a reduced membership, 7% are graduates, and 6% are students.

- **Non-Members** - Although 45% of non-members would consider rejoining, cost and perceived value are the biggest barriers - 57% cite high membership fees as too expensive for the benefits offered, and 39% note general financial constraints. Other reasons include dissatisfaction with AASW's advocacy, a perceived lack of relevant services, and practical issues such as limited work hours or career changes.

KEY INSIGHTS

Benefits	ALL	Qualified			Membership Status			Gender			Cultural		Credentials		Age			
		Student	Yes	No	Member	Past	Never	Female	Male	Other	ATSI	CALD	Yes	No	Under 30	30-49	50-69	Over 69
Uphold professional standards	1.24	1.16	1.24	1.48	1.24	1.24	1.26	1.21	1.34	1.66	1.15	1.25	1.23	1.27	1.27	1.28	1.2	1.11
Advocate for parity and fair compensation for social workers	1.27	1.21	1.27	1.43	1.27	1.29	1.3	1.25	1.34	1.45	1.20	1.21	1.24	1.33	1.2	1.28	1.28	1.29
Advocate for professional recognition	1.35	1.29	1.34	1.75	1.3	1.43	1.42	1.31	1.43	1.76	1.20	1.31	1.29	1.43	1.3	1.37	1.34	1.23
Advocacy to State and Federal Government	1.35	1.21	1.36	1.75	1.35	1.41	1.32	1.34	1.37	1.61	1.30	1.28	1.33	1.39	1.32	1.36	1.36	1.26
Advocacy to influence social policies and promote social justice	1.36	1.22	1.37	1.51	1.39	1.32	1.31	1.33	1.48	1.34	1.19	1.32	1.37	1.34	1.3	1.38	1.36	1.27
Amplify the unique value of social work	1.41	1.31	1.41	1.77	1.41	1.41	1.42	1.37	1.52	1.92	1.34	1.34	1.38	1.44	1.41	1.47	1.34	1.3
Raise public awareness about the critical roles and impacts of social workers	1.45	1.31	1.46	1.62	1.46	1.48	1.41	1.41	1.53	1.89	1.40	1.31	1.42	1.49	1.38	1.51	1.40	1.35
Support ATSI peoples leadership & work together in shaping culturally responsive and anti-racist social work practices.	1.46	1.26	1.47	1.42	1.50	1.48	1.34	1.42	1.55	1.58	1.10	1.39	1.48	1.41	1.3	1.46	1.49	1.42
Resources to assist social workers in their professional practice	1.49	1.34	1.51	1.64	1.50	1.58	1.42	1.47	1.55	2.03	1.38	1.36	1.46	1.54	1.36	1.51	1.50	1.45
Advance inclusivity and diversity within Australia	1.56	1.29	1.59	1.49	1.61	1.59	1.40	1.53	1.69	1.71	1.26	1.39	1.58	1.53	1.37	1.58	1.60	1.46
Provide dynamic upskilling and professional development programs	1.57	1.34	1.59	1.66	1.59	1.69	1.46	1.54	1.65	1.84	1.43	1.41	1.57	1.58	1.42	1.58	1.60	1.45
Act to decolonise oppressive practices	1.59	1.32	1.61	1.64	1.64	1.65	1.4	1.53	1.82	1.57	1.24	1.48	1.61	1.54	1.33	1.57	1.65	1.65
Mobilise the profession on issues impacting the profession in Australia.	1.61	1.36	1.63	1.75	1.64	1.66	1.51	1.57	1.68	1.87	1.45	1.46	1.61	1.61	1.51	1.65	1.59	1.45
Support social workers to navigate emerging trends	1.63	1.38	1.66	1.68	1.66	1.75	1.51	1.62	1.65	1.95	1.39	1.49	1.63	1.63	1.56	1.68	1.61	1.50
Advocate for the registration of the social work profession in Australia	1.65	1.4	1.67	2.00	1.58	1.83	1.65	1.60	1.73	2.34	1.50	1.53	1.59	1.75	1.50	1.67	1.68	1.53
Connect research and theory with practice	1.65	1.45	1.67	1.74	1.68	1.71	1.57	1.63	1.69	2.00	1.48	1.53	1.66	1.64	1.59	1.69	1.63	1.47
Build communities that foster professional excellence and adaptability	1.74	1.45	1.76	1.81	1.78	1.82	1.57	1.72	1.74	2.26	1.49	1.53	1.74	1.74	1.60	1.77	1.73	1.57
Support social workers to recognise and celebrate their unique role in society	1.78	1.46	1.81	1.91	1.82	1.90	1.60	1.75	1.86	2.42	1.64	1.51	1.76	1.81	1.62	1.84	1.76	1.58
Nurture professional communities around areas of social work practice or interest	1.79	1.51	1.82	1.79	1.81	1.91	1.65	1.77	1.80	2.34	1.59	1.57	1.77	1.83	1.61	1.86	1.76	1.69
Nurture professional communities based on geographic areas	1.92	1.55	1.95	1.92	1.94	2.03	1.79	1.90	1.95	2.34	1.54	1.71	1.90	1.95	1.71	2.03	1.85	1.74
Responses	2764	231	2480	53	1579	432	446	2202	476	38	81	726	1726	963	256	1284	1055	133

Legend

1.00–1.39: Very high priority. These items are viewed as crucial to the profession and demand immediate focus.

1.40–1.59: High priority. These items are highly important and should be addressed, though they are secondary to the essential priorities.

1.60–1.79: Moderate priority. These items are still valued, but they do not require the same level of urgency.

1.80–1.99: Lower priority. These items are noted but should receive only minimal focus.

≥ 2.00: Lowest priority. These items are considered of low importance relative to others.

What Social Workers Want

Based on the importance ranking, social workers want AASW to focus on:

1. **Upholding Professional Standards (Essential Priority).** Without a doubt, maintaining and strengthening professional standards is the most critical role the AASW plays. Across all demographics, this consistently ranked as the highest priority. Members expect the AASW to safeguard the profession's integrity, ensuring that qualifications, ethics, and practice standards remain strong. This priority is foundational—without it, the profession risks being diluted or undervalued.

2. **Pay Equity & Professional Recognition (Very High Priority).** Social workers overwhelmingly want fair compensation and greater recognition in line with other allied health professionals. This includes title protection, parity in Medicare rebates, and better employment conditions. The message is clear: advocacy for better pay and stronger professional standing must be a core focus. The lack of recognition compared to psychologists and other professions is seen as a major issue.

3. **Government Advocacy & Social Policy Influence (Very High Priority).** Members want the AASW to engage more actively with State and Federal Governments on both workforce-specific concerns and broader social justice issues. The association is expected to advocate on behalf of social workers, ensuring their voices are heard in policy decisions. This includes funding for social work roles, improvements to Medicare, NDIS advocacy, and workplace conditions. There is also strong support for influencing social policy more broadly—members see AASW as a leader in driving systemic change.

4. **Amplifying the Value of Social Work (High Priority).** Raising public awareness about the role and impact of social work is also important. Members want the AASW to champion the profession, ensuring it is well understood and respected by employers, policymakers, and the public. This aligns closely with advocacy efforts but also includes marketing campaigns and public engagement strategies.5. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership & Culturally Responsive Practice (High Priority)There is a strong push for AASW to continue its work in supporting Indigenous leadership in social work and promoting culturally responsive, anti-racist practices. ATSI and CALD respondents placed particular emphasis on this, reinforcing the need for ongoing work in this area.
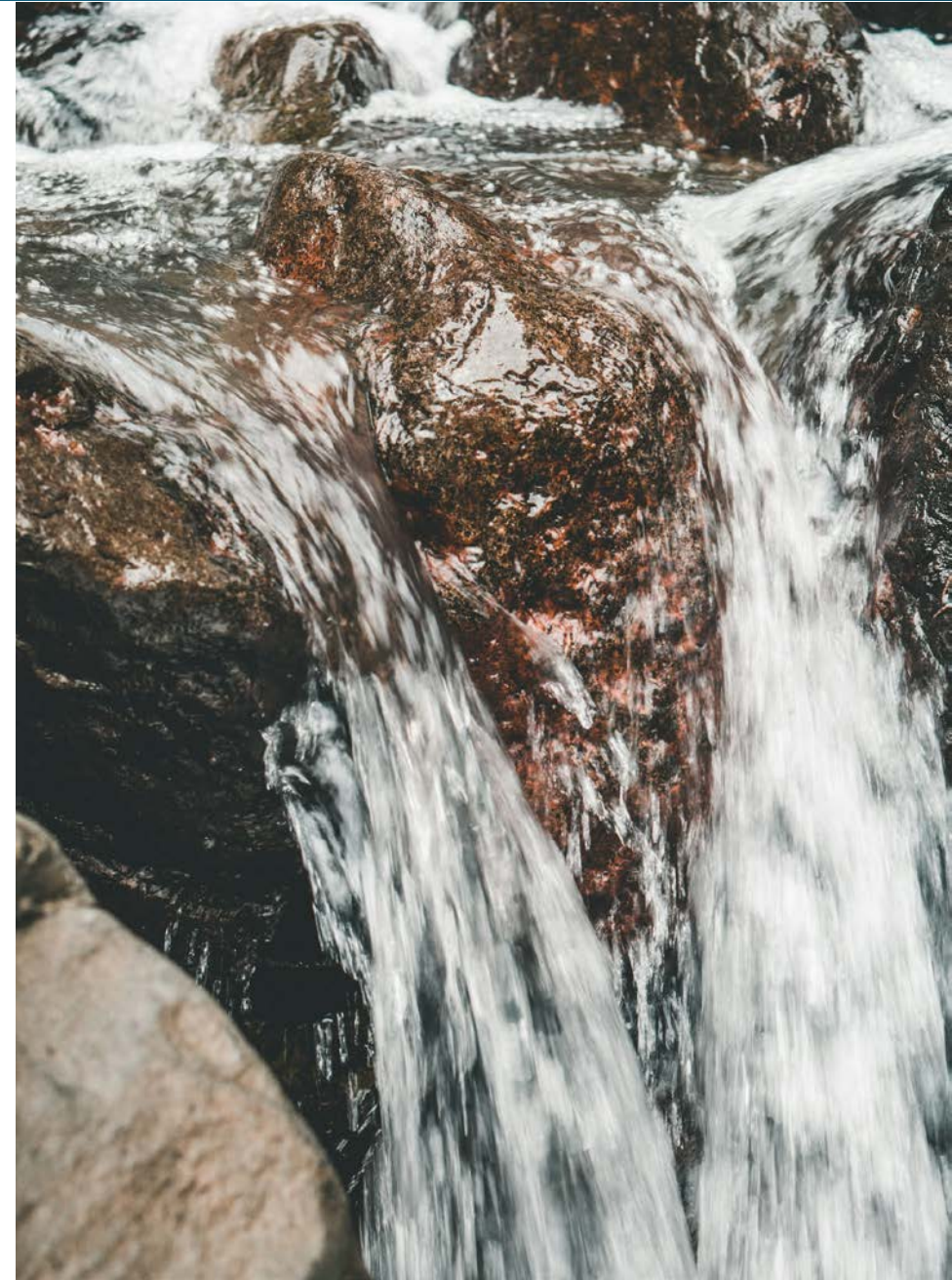
Activities to Re-Prioritise or Reposition

While many AASW initiatives resonate strongly with members, some rank lower in importance or face questions about their practical impact. In a resource-constrained environment, it's vital to consider whether these activities should be repositioned, reduced, or simply better communicated to the profession at large.

Members consistently emphasise that issues such as fair pay, robust advocacy, and professional recognition take precedence, so any secondary initiatives must either support these core goals or clearly demonstrate their unique value.

With this in mind, the following activities are areas where the AASW may wish to revisit its approach - either to streamline resources, better highlight the benefits, or align them more closely with the core advocacy work members see as urgent. By clarifying how these efforts contribute to broader member needs, the AASW can ensure that even lower-ranked activities remain purposeful and relevant.

1. **Building Professional Communities (Lower Priority).** While professional networking is valuable, community-building efforts based on practice area or geography were ranked lower in importance. Members appear to prioritise tangible advocacy and structural change over networking opportunities. While these initiatives can still be supported, they should not divert resources from core advocacy.

2. **Social Work Identity & Celebrations (Lower Priority).** Supporting social workers to recognise and celebrate their unique role in society ranked lower compared to other priorities. While these activities can contribute to morale and engagement, they are not seen as mission-critical.

3. **Registration of Social Work as a Profession (Moderate Priority).** Although some groups see mandatory registration as a priority, it did not rank as high as expected. While the AASW should continue pushing for professional registration, it may not need to be the top advocacy focus in the short term. Members seem more concerned with immediate issues like pay, recognition, and government engagement.
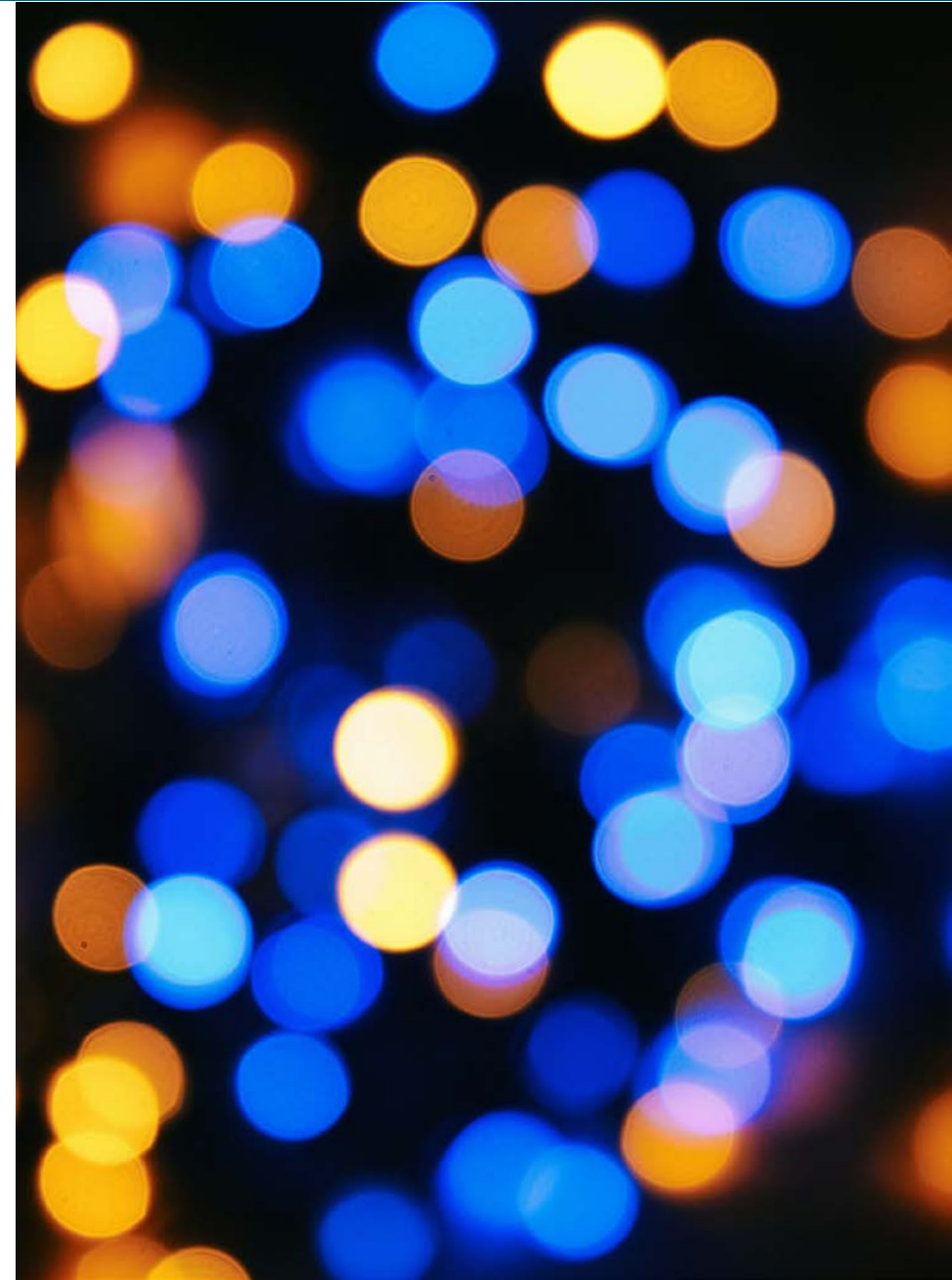
Net Promotor Score

The Net Promotor Score is a rating of customer satisfaction on a scale of 100 to -100. A score above 0 is good, above 20 is favourable, and above 50 is excellent. The further below 0, the more cause for concern.

The AASW Net Promoter Score (NPS) of -25 indicates significant dissatisfaction among respondents, particularly among qualified social workers (-30), past members (-58), and those without credentials (-30). While students (+17) and non-qualified social workers (+13) reported more positive views, overall engagement among established professionals remains a concern.

The Importance Table suggests that dissatisfaction may be linked to unmet priorities such as pay parity, professional recognition, and stronger government advocacy. These are the most critical issues for social workers, yet they remain unresolved, likely contributing to negative perceptions of the AASW.

Membership status plays a major role in NPS ratings, with past members scoring significantly lower (-58), indicating frustration or disengagement after leaving. Current social work members also lean negative (-21), suggesting that while they remain engaged, they do not see enough value in their membership to strongly recommend it.
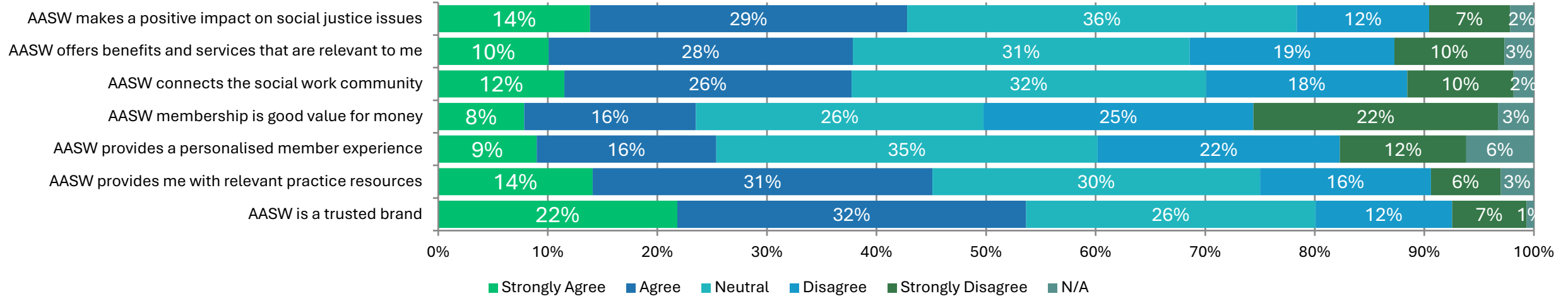
By contrast, students have higher NPS ratings (+17 for students, +41 for student members), suggesting that engagement strategies for early-career social workers are more effective. This highlights an opportunity for AASW to improve retention strategies for experienced social workers, particularly by addressing workforce challenges, recognition, and advocacy outcomes.

Demographic insights reveal greater dissatisfaction among female respondents (-26) and those in mid-career stages (30-49 years: -36). This group likely faces the greatest financial and professional pressures, reinforcing the need for advocacy on pay, working conditions, and professional support. Older members (70+ years) reported a significantly higher NPS (+24), possibly reflecting a sense of legacy appreciation rather than current engagement.

The most urgent strategic response should focus on addressing the key issues raised in the Importance Table, particularly fair pay, recognition, and advocacy for workforce improvements. Improving communication and demonstrating tangible progress in these areas could help rebuild trust and increase engagement among mid-career professionals and long-term members.

OVERALL	Membership Status		
All Responses **-25**	Current Member **-17**	Member – Student **+41**	Member – Social Worker **-21**
		Past Member **-58**	Never Member **-21**
Qualifications			
	Student **+17**	Qualified Social Worker **-30**	Non-Qualified Social Worker **+13**
Gender			
	Female **-26**	Male **-13**	Other Gender **-53**
Cultural		Credentials	
ATSI **-10**	CALD **-4**	Credentials **-22**	No Credentials **-30**
Ages			
Under 30 years **-15**	30-49 years **-36**	50-69 Years **-21**	70 Years+ **+24**

KEY INSIGHTS

Strength of agreement with statements (n=2756)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
AASW makes a positive impact on social justice issues	14%	29%	36%	12%	7%	2%
AASW offers benefits and services that are relevant to me	10%	28%	31%	19%	10%	3%
AASW connects the social work community	12%	26%	32%	18%	10%	2%
AASW membership is good value for money	8%	16%	26%	25%	22%	3%
AASW provides a personalised member experience	9%	16%	35%	22%	12%	6%
AASW provides me with relevant practice resources	14%	31%	30%	16%	6%	3%
AASW is a trusted brand	22%	32%	26%	12%	7%	1%

This data provides valuable insight into how members perceive the AASW's value, relevance, and impact. Several trends emerge that align with findings from the NPS and Activity Importance Table:

1. **Trust in the AASW is Mixed**. Trust in the AASW is lukewarm. While 54% see it as a trusted brand, 19% disagree, and 26% are neutral, indicating indifference or uncertainty. This suggests the organisation needs to strengthen its credibility and transparency, ensuring members see real value in their affiliation.

2. **Perceived Lack of Value for Money.** Perceptions of membership value are a major concern—only 24% believe it's worth the cost, while 47% disagree. This aligns with negative Net Promoter Scores, particularly from past and long-term members, reinforcing the need for more tangible benefits, stronger advocacy results, and clearer communication of benefits.

3. **Low Ratings on Personalised Member Experience**. AASW's engagement feels impersonal to many. Just 25% agree it provides a personalised experience, while 34% disagree, and 35% remain neutral. This suggests members don't feel individually supported, particularly qualified social workers and past members, who may feel overlooked. Segmenting services to better meet career-stage and practice needs could improve retention and satisfaction.

4. **Limited Perceived Relevance of Services and Benefits**. Only 38% of respondents find AASW's services relevant, while 29% disagree, and 31% are unsure. This suggests either poor communication of offerings or misalignment with members' needs. To shift perceptions, AASW must better tailor, promote, and demonstrate the impact of its benefits.

5. **AASW is Not Strongly Connecting the Social Work Community**. The AASW is not widely seen as a connector. Only 38% agree it fosters community, 28% disagree, and 32% are neutral, reflecting low engagement or lack of interest in existing networking efforts. Members appear to value advocacy and professional development over broad networking, reinforcing the need to refocus branch efforts on tangible, career-enhancing initiatives.

6. **Mixed Perceptions of Social Justice Impact**. While 43% acknowledge AASW's role in social justice, 36% are neutral, and 19% disagree. Given that policy influence ranks highly in priority areas, AASW must better communicate its wins and ensure members see tangible outcomes from its efforts.

Branch Insights

- **Engagement in Past 2 Years** - Although branch engagement is low (with fewer than 10% of respondents attending branch-led advocacy or social justice activities), many members show a clear interest in these initiatives. World Social Work Day sees the highest attendance, but overall results suggest branches can increase participation by focusing on advocacy, offering tangible professional benefits, and making events more accessible to busy professionals.

- **Branch Priorities**: Advocacy on professional and social justice issues clearly tops the list of branch priorities, with strong support also for culturally significant events such as NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week. Meanwhile, professional growth opportunities outrank general social networking, though events like World Social Work Day still hold moderate importance. Overall, respondents want branches to focus on tangible, advocacy-driven activities that offer direct professional and social impact.

- **Branch Effectiveness**: Across all branch activities, fewer than a quarter of respondents rated them as "Very Effective" or "Effective," suggesting a need for more impactful and visible outcomes. Advocacy and social justice initiatives perform slightly better than networking events, yet they still under-deliver on member expectations. Cultural events (like NAIDOC and Reconciliation Week) and World Social Work Day also have low perceived effectiveness, indicating that branches must refine their approach - emphasising relevance, tangible results, and clear communication to boost engagement.

- **Volunteering:** Volunteering rates across AASW leadership and committee roles are generally low, with most members either unaware of these opportunities or unconvinced of their value. While there's moderate interest in policy and advocacy work, many cite time constraints, communication gaps, and disillusionment with leadership as barriers. Notably, the Reconciliation Action Plan Committee attracts higher interest than most other committees, but overall engagement remains hampered by a perceived lack of tangible impact and support.

- **Factors Inhibiting Branch Participation:** Lack of time (46%) and cost (43%) top the list of barriers to branch engagement, while 41% of respondents simply weren't aware that branch activities existed. Together with issues like limited local offerings (32%), inconvenient timing, and minimal employer support, these findings highlight a need for better communication, flexible scheduling, and more accessible, high-value activities.

Implications for State Branches

State branches can align with the AASW's highest priorities by focusing on targeted government advocacy. Based on these results, their primary role should be lobbying for funding, workforce recognition, and legislative reforms, ensuring social workers' concerns are represented in state-level decision-making.

This requires proactive engagement with policymakers, submissions to government inquiries, and direct advocacy for policies that support social workers and their clients.

To strengthen their impact, state branches could shift from general networking to strategic professional development. Offering targeted CPD, wage advocacy forums, and training on policy influence will ensure social workers are equipped with the skills to drive systemic change within their workplaces and the broader profession.

State branches could also play a key role in amplifying the value of social work, engaging with local media, universities, and stakeholders to strengthen public awareness. Localised advocacy efforts will enhance the profession's visibility and reinforce national campaigns.

In line with member priorities, state branches must embed culturally responsive practice by partnering with Indigenous and CALD-led organisations. Ensuring equitable representation and tailored support for these communities will strengthen inclusion within the profession.

With this focused mandate, state branches could be advocacy-driven entities that deliver tangible outcomes. By prioritising government engagement, workforce protections, and professional recognition, they can directly contribute to the AASW's broader strategic goals and the future of the profession.
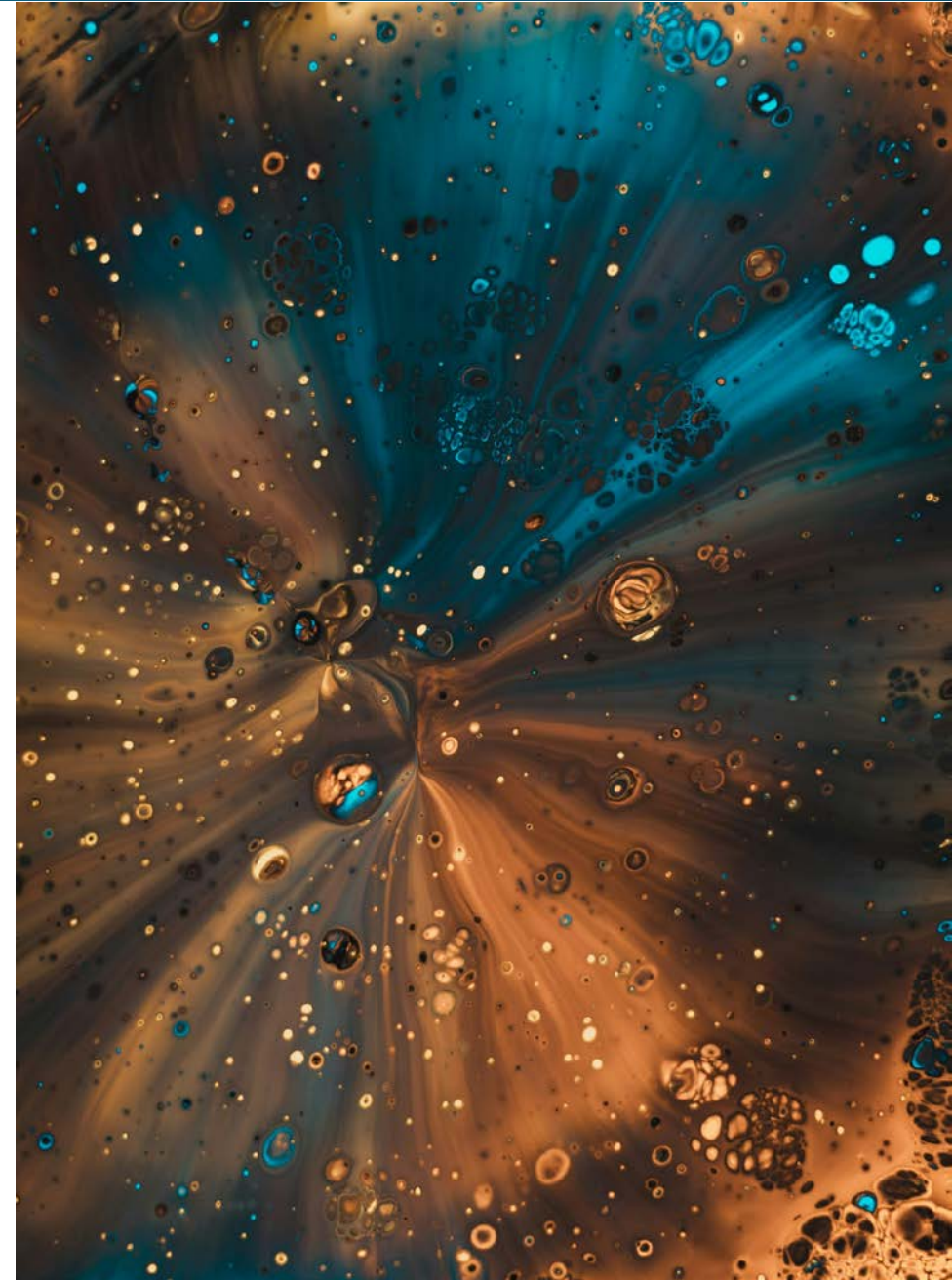
# Full Respondent Overview

RESPONDENT OVERVIEW

Social Work Status (n=3034)

- I am a qualified social worker. — 87%
- I'm currently studying social work. — 8%
- I do not have a social work qualification but identify and practice as a social worker. — 2%
- I am not a social worker. — 2%

Role Type (n=2411)

- Currently practising with clients — 65%
- Working in a leadership/management role — 22%
- Working in education — 14%
- Currently practising as a consultant — 12%
- I am a social work student — 9%
- Working in research — 6%
- I am on a career break or seeking... — 5%
- Working in policy development — 5%
- I am retired — 5%
- I am still working but no longer in the field... — 3%

A total of 3,034 individuals responded to the survey, with the vast majority being qualified social workers (87%), followed by a smaller proportion of social work students (8%). Additionally, 2% of respondents identified as practicing social workers despite not holding formal qualifications. The remaining 2% were not social workers and were disqualified from completing the survey. As a result, the findings primarily reflect the perspectives of qualified and emerging social work professionals, providing insights into the experiences, challenges, and needs of those working within the field.
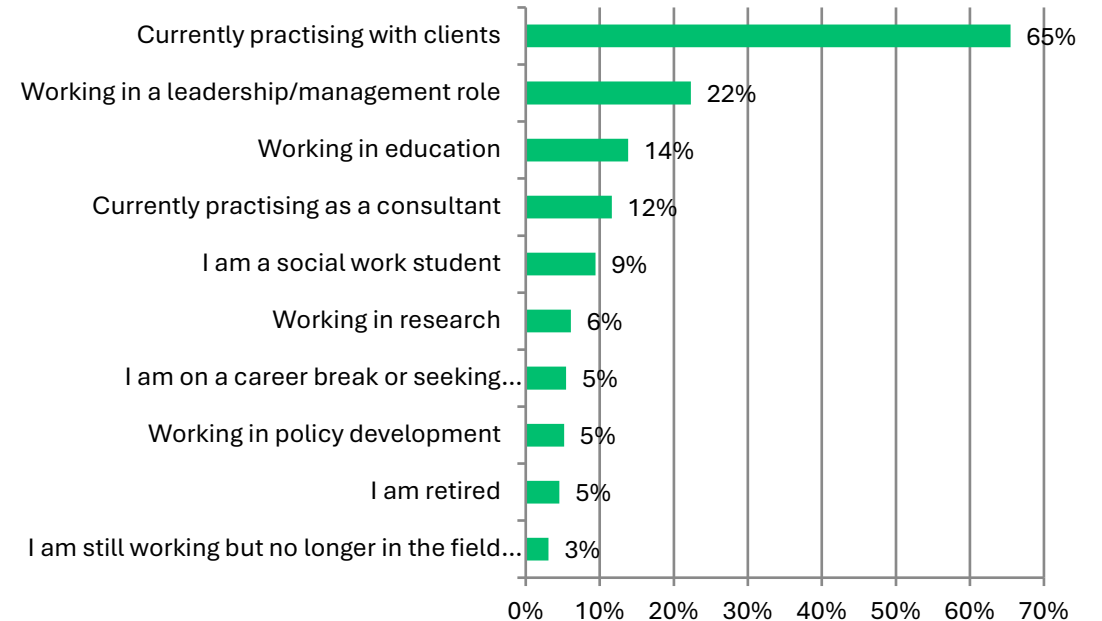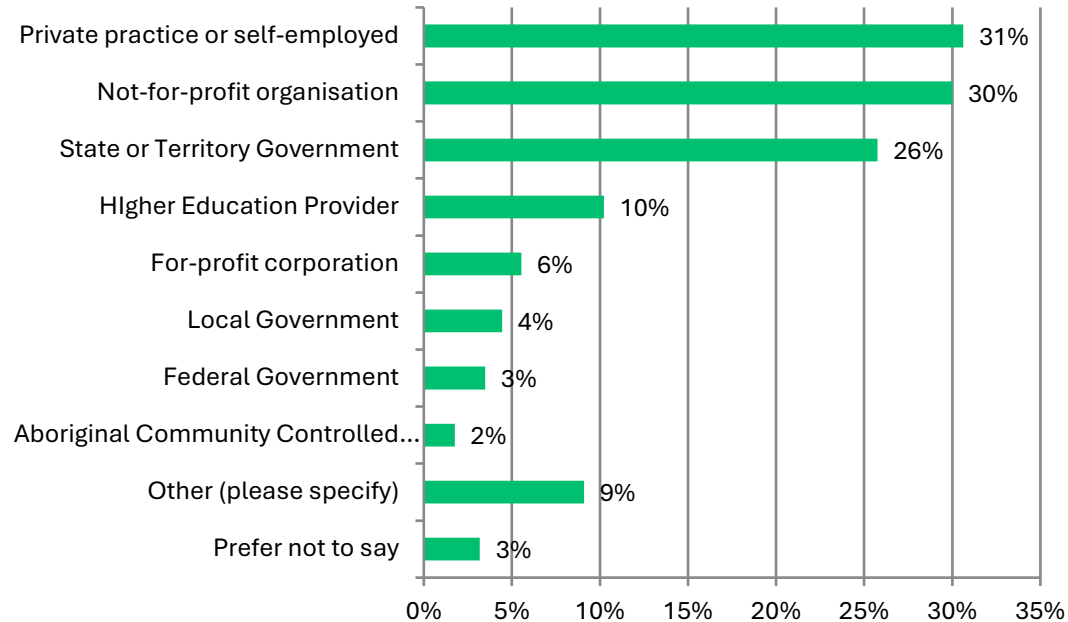
The survey data highlights the diverse roles within the social work profession, with 65% of respondents currently practising with clients, indicating a strong presence of direct service providers. Additionally, 22% are working in leadership or management roles, reflecting the significant number of social workers in supervisory and decision-making positions.

RESPONDENT OVERVIEW

Work Setting (n=2387)

Work Setting	Percentage
Private practice or self-employed	31%
Not-for-profit organisation	30%
State or Territory Government	26%
HIgher Education Provider	10%
For-profit corporation	6%
Local Government	4%
Federal Government	3%
Aboriginal Community Controlled...	2%
Other (please specify)	9%
Prefer not to say	3%

AASW Credentials (n=2486)

| AASW Credential	Percentage
Social Worker (Accredited Social Worker)	53%
Mental Health	22%
Clinical	4%
Supervisor	4%
Child Protection	4%
Family Violence	3%
Disability	3%
School	2%
Older Persons	2%
Fellow	1%
None of the above	36%

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The survey data indicates that social workers are employed across a diverse range of sectors, with the largest proportion (31%) working in private practice or self-employment. This highlights the growing trend of social workers operating independently, particularly in clinical, counselling, and therapeutic roles. The not-for-profit sector also represents a significant share (30%), reinforcing the profession's strong presence in community services, welfare organisations, and advocacy groups. Meanwhile, 26% of respondents work for state or territory governments, showing a substantial portion of social workers engaged in public service roles such as child protection, health, and social policy.
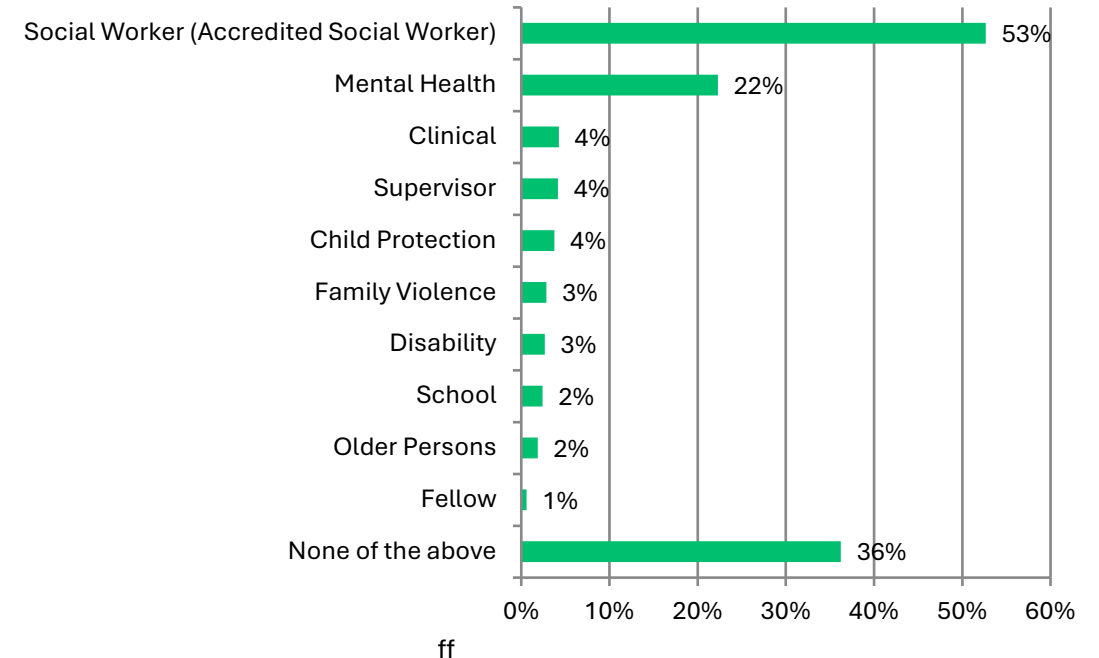
The survey results indicate that 53% of respondents (1,499 people) hold the Accredited Social Worker credential, making it the most common AASW credential. 22% (634 respondents) have Mental Health accreditation, highlighting a significant presence of social workers in this specialised area. Other credentials, such as Clinical (4%), Supervisor (4%), Child Protection (4%), and Family Violence (3%), had smaller but notable representation. Credentials in School (2%), Older Persons (2%), and Disability (3%) were less common. A small proportion (1% or 17 respondents) held the Fellow credential, representing high-level professional recognition. Notably, 36% (1,031 respondents) indicated they hold no AASW credentials.

Years Experience (n=2415)
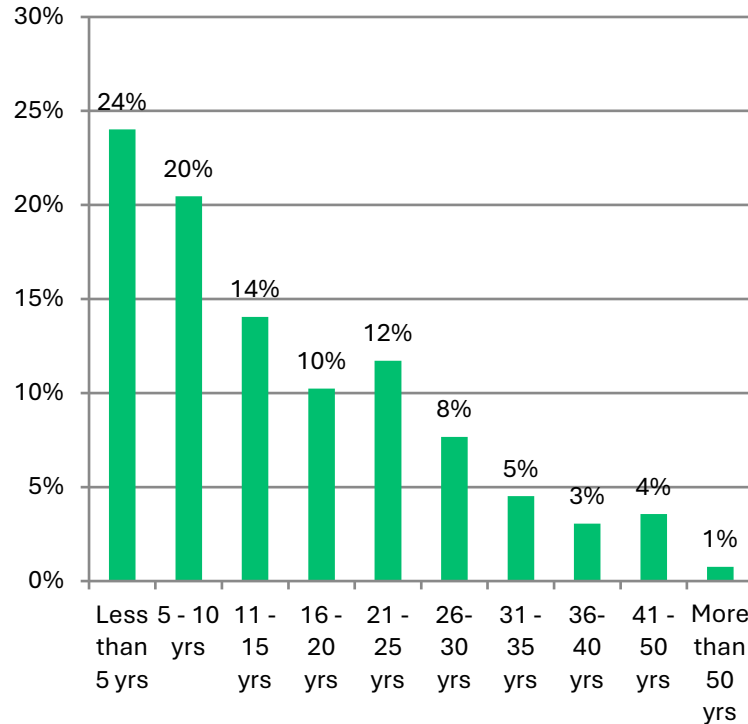
The survey data highlights a diverse range of experience levels within the social work profession. Nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents have less than five years of experience, indicating a strong presence of early-career social workers. Another 20% have between 5-10 years of experience, suggesting a significant proportion of mid-career professionals.

Primary Field(s) (n=2396)
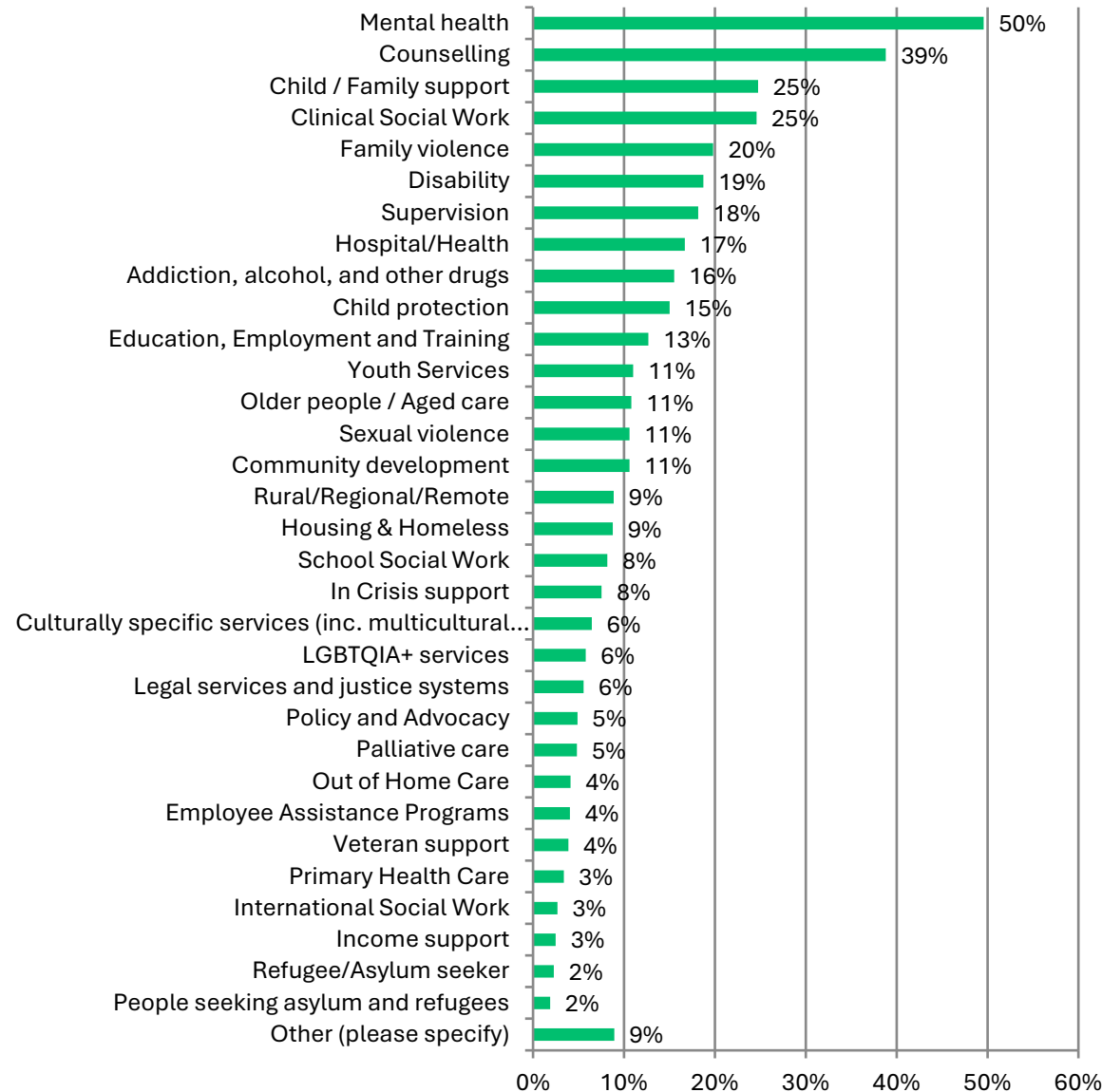
The survey data reveals a broad range of practice areas within the social work profession, highlighting the diversity of roles and specialisations.

The most common fields of practice among respondents were mental health (50%), counselling (39%), clinical social work (25%), and child/family support (25%), indicating a strong presence of social workers in therapeutic and direct client support roles.

9% of respondents selected "Other", with varied specialisations such as forensic social work, Indigenous services, justice systems, research, and trauma therapy. The long list of specific "Other" responses suggests that many social workers practice in niche or emerging areas that may not fit neatly into traditional categories.

RESPONDENT OVERVIEW

State (n=2928)

Location (n=2917)
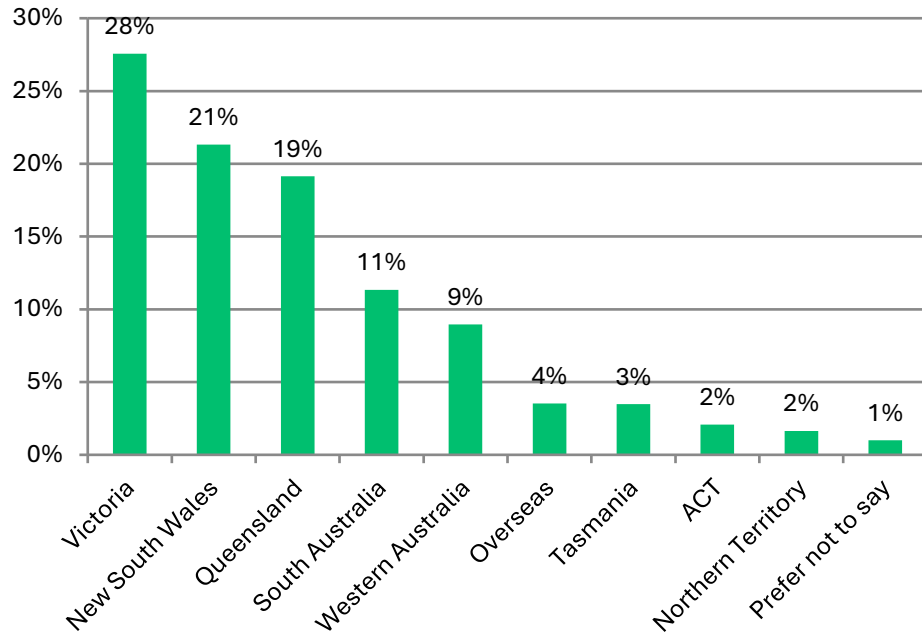
The survey respondents were geographically diverse, with representation from all Australian states and territories, as well as a small portion from overseas. The largest proportion of respondents were based in Victoria (28%), followed by New South Wales (21%) and Queensland (19%), reflecting the concentration of social workers in these highly populated states. South Australia (11%) and Western Australia (9%) also had notable participation. Smaller percentages of respondents came from Tasmania (3%), the ACT (2%), and the Northern Territory (2%), highlighting the presence of social workers in more regional and remote areas. Additionally, 4% of respondents were based overseas, while 1% preferred not to disclose their location.
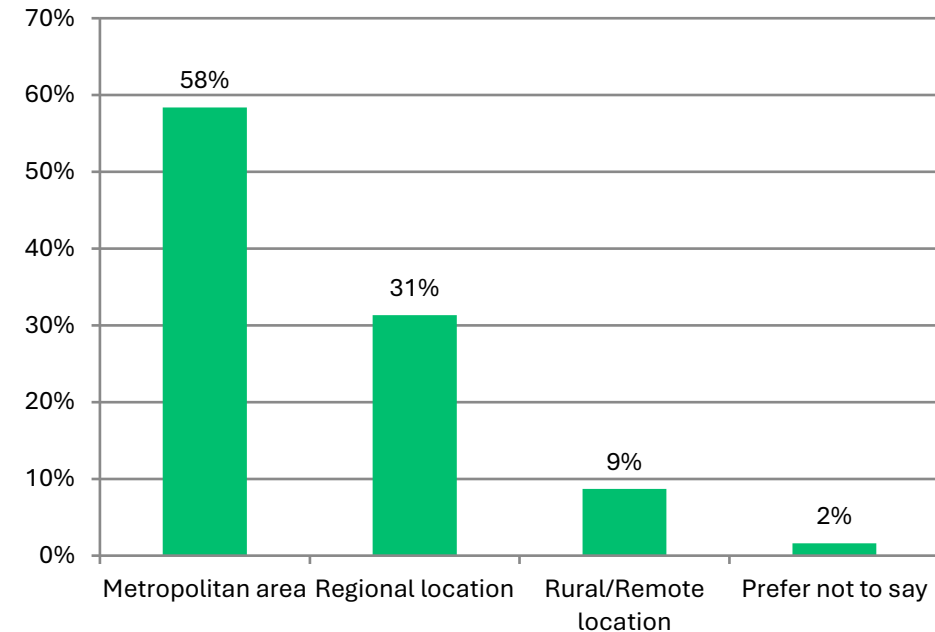
The majority of survey respondents (58%) are based in metropolitan areas, reflecting the concentration of social workers in major cities. However, 31% of respondents are located in regional areas, highlighting the significant presence of social workers outside urban centres. A smaller but notable 9% work in rural or remote locations, where access to social services can be more limited, presenting unique challenges. Additionally, 2% of respondents preferred not to disclose their location.

RESPONDENT OVERVIEW

Age (n=2927)

Gender (n=2926)

Background (n=2926)
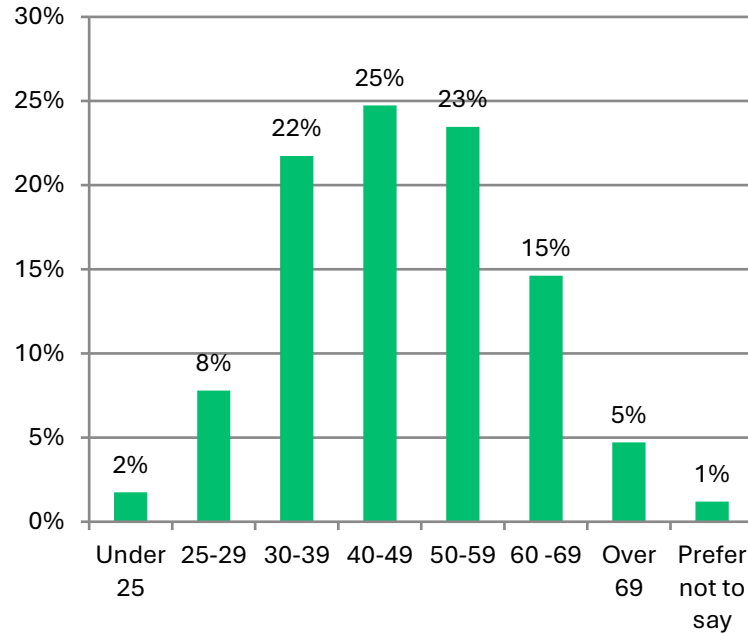
The age distribution of survey respondents reflects a diverse range of experience levels within the social work profession. The largest age groups were those aged 40-49 (25%) and 50-59 (23%), indicating a strong representation of mid-career professionals. A further 22% were aged 30-39, suggesting a significant proportion of early to mid-career social workers. Meanwhile, 15% of respondents were aged 60-69, with an additional 5% over 69, highlighting the presence of experienced practitioners, including those nearing retirement. Younger professionals were less represented, with 8% aged 25-29 and just 2% under 25. A small number (1%) preferred not to disclose their age.
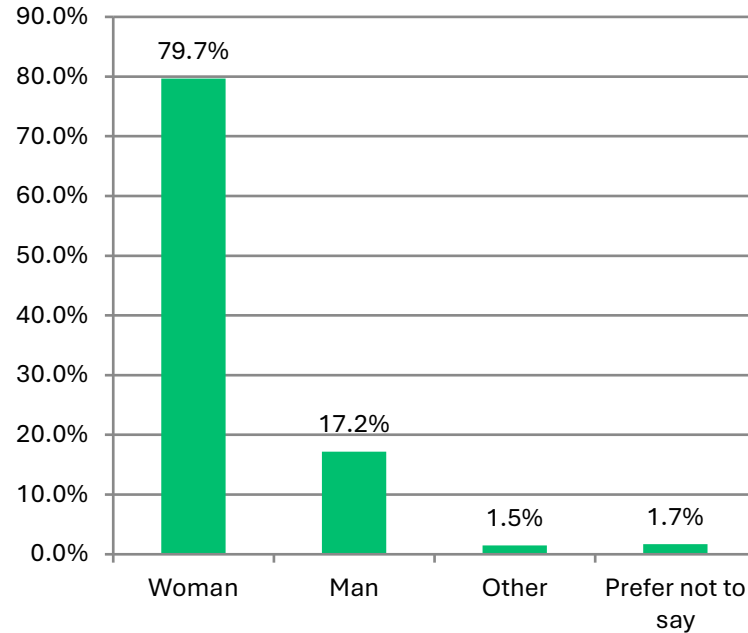
The survey respondents were predominantly women (79.7%), reflecting the well-documented gender distribution within the social work profession. Men accounted for 17.2% of respondents, while 1.5% identified as another gender. Additionally, 1.7% preferred not to disclose their gender identity. With 2,926 responses, this data highlights the profession's strong female representation, a trend consistent with broader workforce demographics in social work and related caring professions.
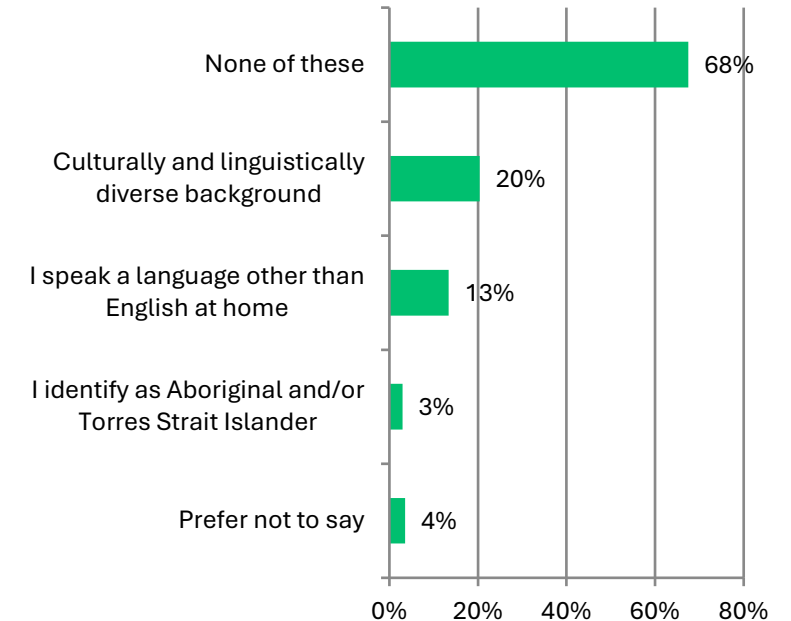
The survey respondents represented a range of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. 3% (86 respondents) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, highlighting the presence of First Nations social workers. 13% (392 respondents) spoke a language other than English at home, reflecting linguistic diversity within the profession. Additionally, 20% (596 respondents) identified as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, indicating a significant proportion of social workers with diverse heritage. However, the majority of respondents (68%) did not identify with these categories, while 4% preferred not to disclose their background.

RESPONDENT OVERVIEW

Member Status (n=2465)

- Member more than 5 yrs — 39%
- Member less than 5 yrs — 25%
- Resigned in the last 3 yrs — 12%
- Resigned over 3 yrs ago — 6%
- Never been a member — 18%
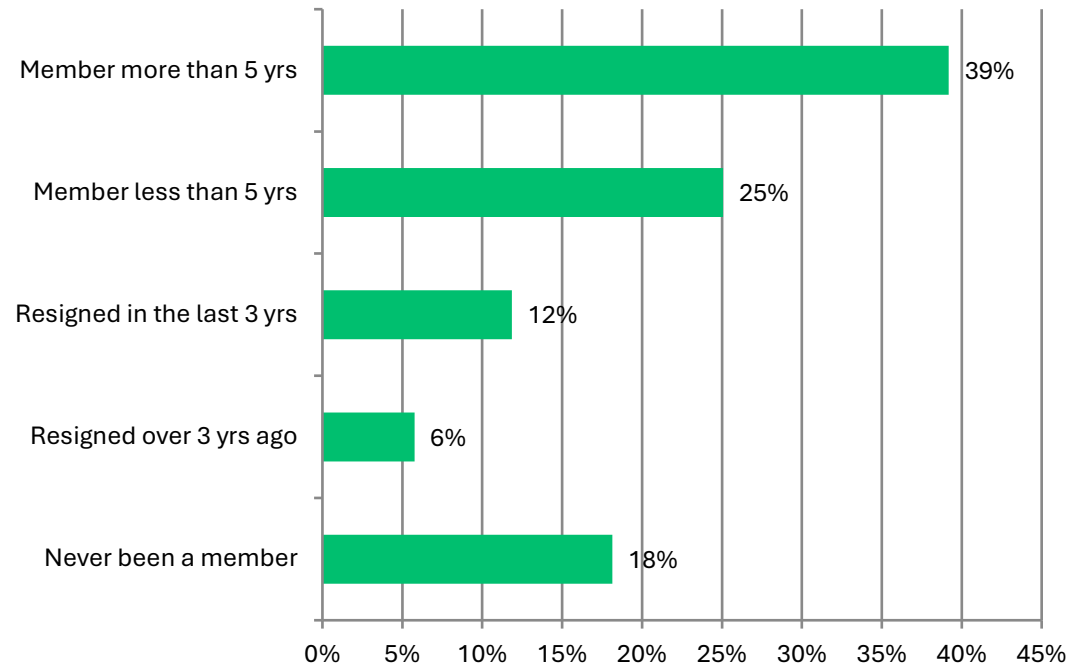
The survey data indicates that 64% of respondents are current AASW members, with 39% having been members for more than five years and 25% for less than five years.

Membership Level (n=1581)

- Retired — 3%
- Life Member — 1%
- Full Member — 68%
- Member Reduced — 15%
- Graduate — 7%
- Student — 6%
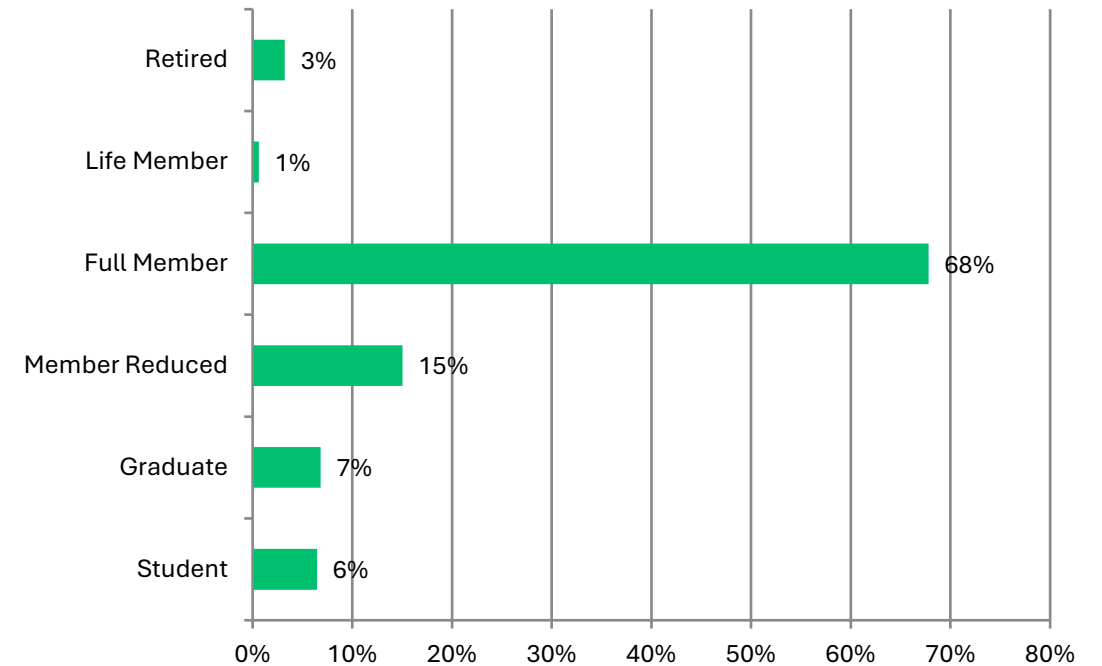
The survey data shows that the majority of respondents who identified as AASW members are Full Members (67.81%). Additionally, 15.05% hold a reduced membership, suggesting that a notable proportion of members may be working part-time or experiencing financial constraints.

Rejoin Potential (n=861)
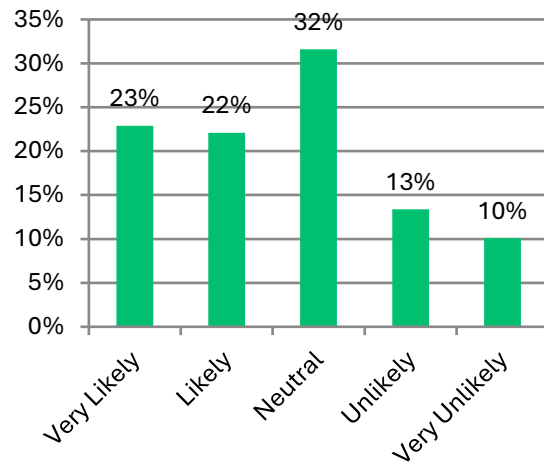
The survey data indicates mixed sentiment regarding potential AASW membership among non-members. While 45% of respondents would consider joining in the future - suggesting nearly half of the respondents are open to joining should their perception change. A notable 32% remain neutral and 23% of respondents are disinclined to join, Indicating that significant work will be required to engage this group.

Reasons for Not Joining (n=863)

The most significant barriers to AASW membership relate to cost and perceived value. A majority of respondents (57%) felt that membership fees were too expensive for the benefits provided, with 39% citing financial constraints as a key reason for non-membership.

Dissatisfaction with AASW's advocacy and services was also a major factor. 18% felt that AASW does not advocate on issues important to them, while 12% disagreed with AASW's position on certain issues. Additionally, 21% were unhappy with the service, and 19% reported not using the benefits when they were members.
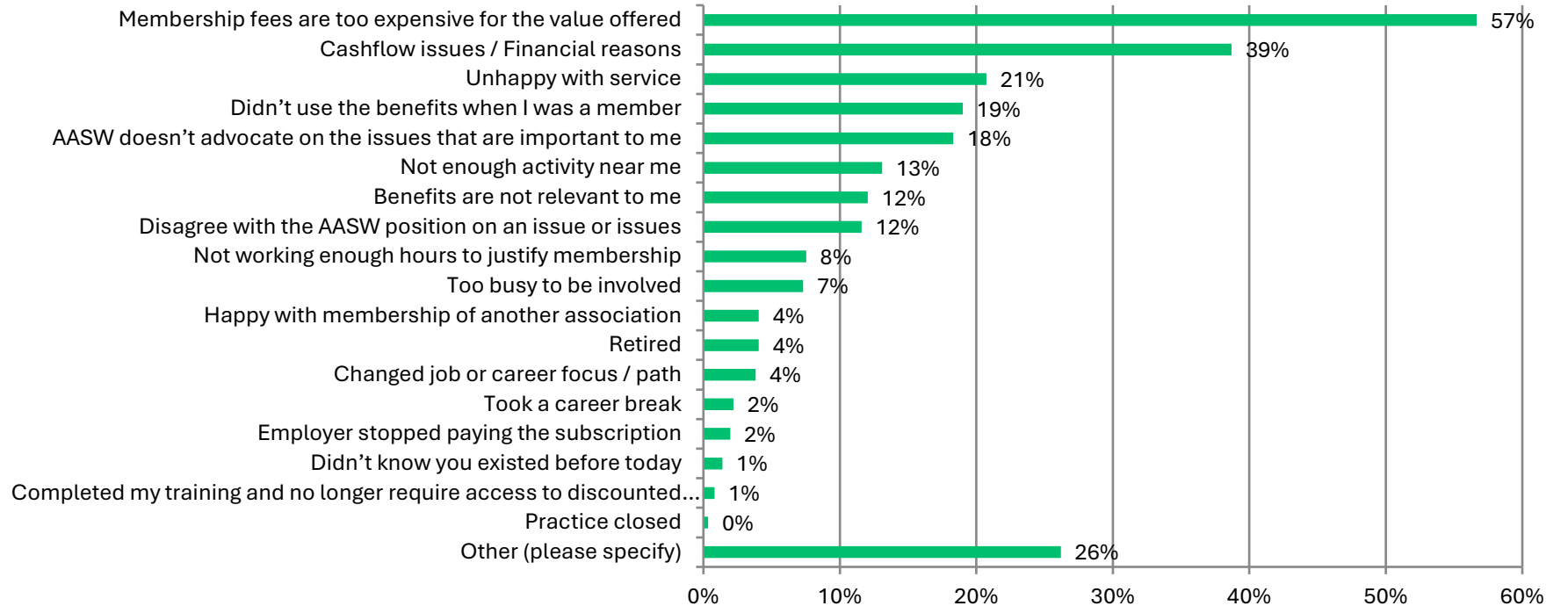
Other common reasons included practical or career-related factors, such as not working enough hours to justify membership (8%), being too busy (7%), or being retired (4%). Additionally, 13% cited a lack of AASW activity in their area, indicating that regional engagement may need improvement. A significant proportion (26%) selected "Other". The "Other" comments included barriers for internationally qualified social workers, financial hardship and cost-prohibitive membership fees, frustration with AASW processes and bureaucracy, perceived lack of advocacy and representation, career stage or employment status, and emotional disconnection and lack of support for members.

RESPONDENT OVERVIEW

Analysis of the 226 "Other" Comments in response to "Can you please share your reasons for not being a member?"

While cost and lack of perceived benefits remain the primary reasons for non-membership, these "Other" responses highlight additional systemic barriers such as international credentialing, bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of advocacy, and emotional disconnect. Addressing these concerns through more accessible pathways, flexible pricing, streamlined processes, and stronger advocacy efforts could increase engagement and rebuild trust in AASW. These responses broadly fall into six key themes, with some unique perspectives not captured in the standard response options.

1. **Barriers for Internationally Qualified Social Workers**. A significant number of respondents highlighted barriers to membership for internationally qualified social workers, particularly issues related to English language requirements and the cost and complexity of the assessment process. Many expressed frustration that despite working as social workers in other English-speaking countries, they are still required to complete expensive IELTS Academic tests. Others felt that the AASW does not offer alternative pathways or recognition of prior experience in a way that aligns with other professional bodies like AHPRA.

2. **Financial Hardship and Cost-Prohibitive Membership Fees.** While cost was already identified as a major factor in the structured response options, additional comments emphasised financial struggles related to unpaid student placements, carer responsibilities, and part-time work. Some respondents indicated that they wanted to join but couldn't justify the financial burden, particularly when employers do not subsidise membership fees. Others pointed out that membership bundles insurance into the cost, making it unaffordable for those who do not require insurance.

3. **Frustration with AASW Processes and Bureaucracy.** Several respondents described frustration with AASW's bureaucracy, particularly in website navigation, credentialing, and CPD processes. Some found application forms overly complex, while others reported being unable to submit required documents. Additionally, those trying to rejoin after a break or career transition found the process difficult and discouraging.

4. **Perceived Lack of Advocacy and Representation.** Many respondents felt that AASW does not represent their interests or advocate effectively for the profession. Some believed that AASW has become too focused on professional registration and private practice, neglecting social justice and macro-level advocacy. Others felt that political biases within AASW (e.g., responses to international conflicts) affected their decision not to engage with the organisation. A handful of respondents felt that AASW's leadership and governance lacked transparency, particularly regarding recent internal conflicts. The perceived corporatisation of AASW and lack of advocacy on key issues may be alienating members who want a stronger social justice focus.

5. **Career Stage or Employment Status.** A number of respondents indicated that they were still students, recent graduates, or currently unemployed, making membership unnecessary or unaffordable at this stage. Others mentioned not needing membership for their current job, particularly in government or research roles where AASW accreditation is not required.

6. **Emotional Disconnection and Lack of Support for Members.** Some respondents expressed a deep sense of exclusion and lack of support from AASW. One individual with work-related PTSD described feeling abandoned by the organisation, particularly when struggling with burnout and vicarious trauma. Others noted that AASW failed to provide meaningful individual support or engagement opportunities beyond discounts on corporate products.
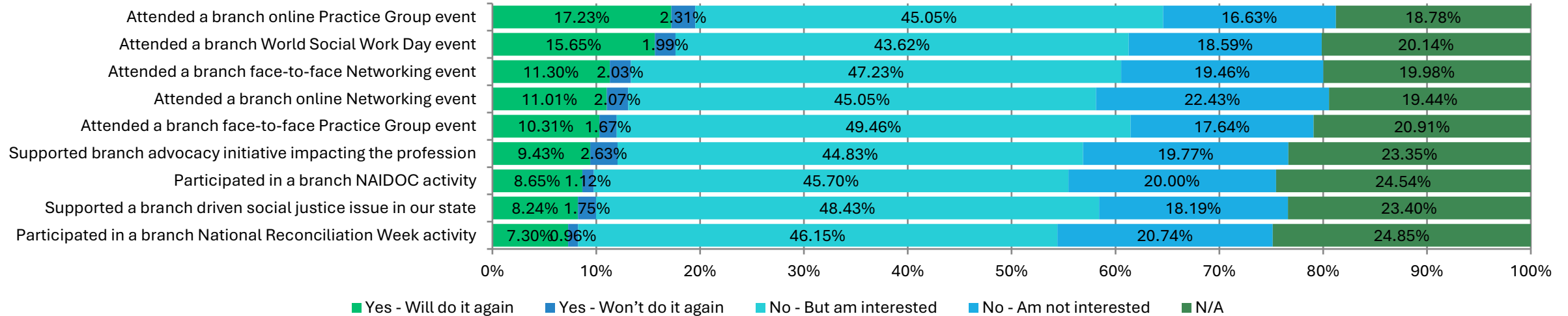
Detailed Question Analysis

Additional General Comments

The 631 responses provided in the open-ended feedback question at the end of the survey reflects strong and diverse opinions about the AASW, highlighting both frustrations and opportunities for improvement. Key concerns centred on membership affordability, professional recognition, advocacy efforts, and accessibility of CPD and accreditation pathways. Despite these criticisms, some members acknowledged the value of AASW's work and expressed a desire to see the organisation become more transparent, engaged, and responsive to the needs of social workers across all fields. The following themes outline the core issues raised in the feedback..

1. **Cost and Perceived Value of Membership**. Many respondents expressed frustration with the high cost of membership fees, particularly in comparison to other professional associations. Some noted that membership does not provide enough tangible benefits to justify the cost, and others called for tiered pricing, flexible payment plans, or employer-supported membership options.

2. **Professional Recognition and Registration.** There was widespread frustration over the lack of national registration for social workers, with many arguing that registration is necessary to elevate the profession's status and ensure fair pay. Respondents also expressed concern about pay disparities between social workers and other allied health professionals, such as psychologists.

3. **Mental Health Accreditation and Credentialing Issues.** Several respondents criticised the Mental Health Accreditation process, calling it outdated, unclear, and overly complicated. Others felt that additional credentialing requirements were a "cash grab", adding costs without clear benefits.

4. **AASW's Role in Advocacy and Policy.** Respondents had mixed views on AASW's advocacy efforts. Some felt the organisation focuses too much on private practice and neglects public sector and community-based social work. Others felt that AASW should take stronger positions on social justice issues, particularly regarding NDIS, mental health funding, and wage disparities. There were also calls for AASW to take a stronger stance on political and international human rights issues, with several respondents mentioning the conflict in Gaza.

5. **Issues with AASW Communication and Member Engagement.** Several respondents were critical of AASW's responsiveness, stating that emails and inquiries often go unanswered. Others felt that AASW leadership is disconnected from members, making decisions without adequate consultation. Additionally, some members found the website difficult to navigate, particularly for CPD logging and credentialing applications.

6. **Education and CPD Accessibility.** A recurring concern was the cost of CPD courses, with many stating that professional development opportunities should be included in membership or offered at reduced rates. Others called for more advanced, specialised, or internationally recognised training opportunities.

7. **International Social Workers and Language Requirements.** Several internationally trained social workers shared frustration over the AASW's assessment process, particularly English language requirements. Many argued that IELTS testing should not be required for those who have worked in English-speaking countries or hold qualifications from recognised institutions.

8. **Perceived Corporate and Bureaucratic Culture.** Many respondents felt that AASW operates more like a business than a professional association, with a focus on generating revenue rather than supporting members. Some compared AASW unfavourably to unions and other professional bodies, stating that it does not provide the same level of advocacy or support.

Branch Engagement in Past 2 Years (n=2535)

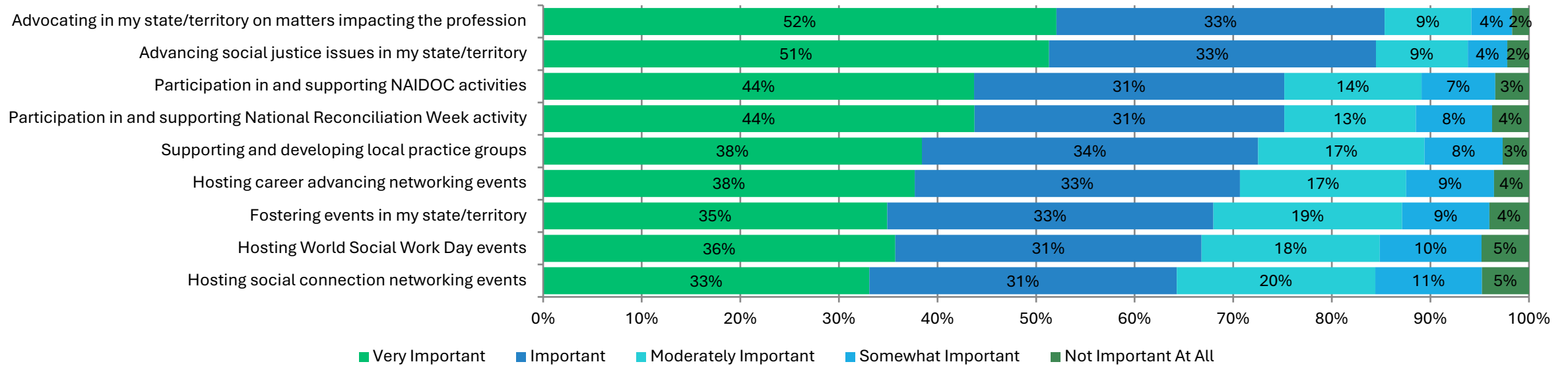|	Yes - Will do it again	Yes - Won't do it again	No - But am interested	No - Am not interested	N/A
Attended a branch online Practice Group event	17.23%	2.31%	45.05%	16.63%	18.78%
Attended a branch World Social Work Day event	15.65%	1.99%	43.62%	18.59%	20.14%
Attended a branch face-to-face Networking event	11.30%	2.03%	47.23%	19.46%	19.98%
Attended a branch online Networking event	11.01%	2.07%	45.05%	22.43%	19.44%
Attended a branch face-to-face Practice Group event	10.31%	1.67%	49.46%	17.64%	20.91%
Supported branch advocacy initiative impacting the profession	9.43%	2.63%	44.83%	19.77%	23.35%
Participated in a branch NAIDOC activity	8.65%	1.12%	45.70%	20.00%	24.54%
Supported a branch driven social justice issue in our state	8.24%	1.75%	48.43%	18.19%	23.40%
Participated in a branch National Reconciliation Week activity	7.30%	0.96%	46.15%	20.74%	24.85%

The data suggests branches could play an important role if better align with what members want - more advocacy, more tangible professional benefits, and accessible ways to engage.

1. **Grow Participation, High Interest in Advocacy & Social Justice Initiatives.** While less than 10% of respondents actively participated in branch-led advocacy or social justice initiatives, nearly half expressed interest. This indicates strong demand for these activities, but possibly barriers to participation such as accessibility, communication, or perceived impact. Branches should prioritise advocacy and social justice work but rethink how they engage members—offering clearer calls to action, more accessible involvement opportunities, and better visibility of outcomes.

2. **Cultural & Commemorative Events Are Overlooked**. Participation in NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week activities is similarly low (7-9% engaged), yet nearly half of respondents expressed interest. These events align with AASW's commitment to cultural responsiveness, so increasing outreach, accessibility, and collaboration with Indigenous-led initiatives could encourage greater participation.

3. **Limited Engagement in Professional Networking & Practice Groups.** Face-to-face and online Practice Groups and Networking events see low engagement, with less than 20% of members attending, but over 45% showing interest. This suggests that while professional networking is valued, current formats may not meet member needs. Branches should explore alternative engagement methods, such as more structured CPD-linked networking, smaller peer groups, or hybrid models that cater to different work schedules and geographic locations.

4. **Strongest Engagement in World Social Work Day, But Still Room to Grow**. World Social Work Day had the highest participation (15.65%), showing that members respond well to events with a clear professional identity and purpose. However, engagement is still below a quarter of respondents, indicating that broader promotional efforts and clearer value propositions (e.g., CPD accreditation, advocacy tie-ins) could improve turnout.
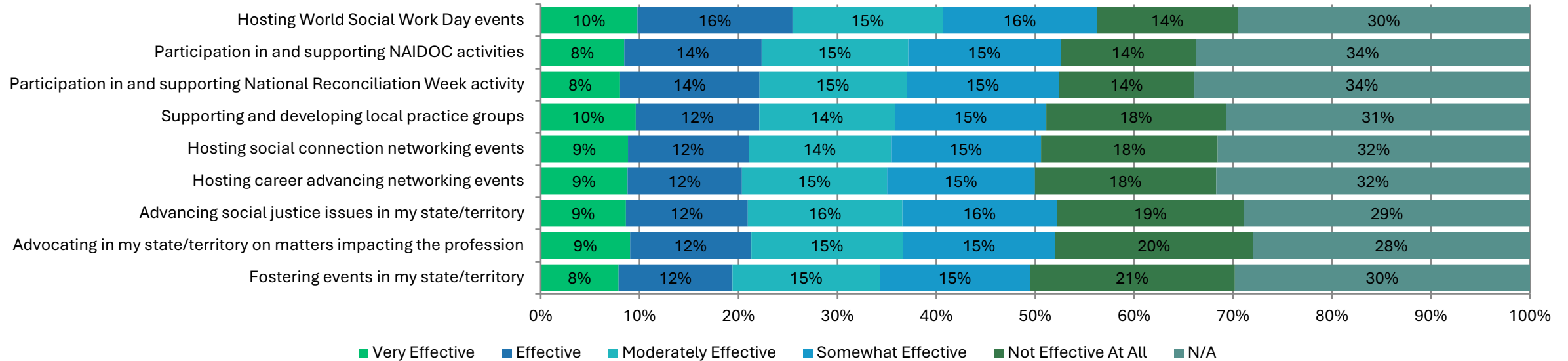
DETAILED QUESTION ANALYSIS

Importance of Branch Activities (n=2424)

Activity	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important At All
Advocating in my state/territory on matters impacting the profession	52%	33%	9%	4%	2%
Advancing social justice issues in my state/territory	51%	33%	9%	4%	2%
Participation in and supporting NAIDOC activities	44%	31%	14%	7%	3%
Participation in and supporting National Reconciliation Week activity	44%	31%	13%	8%	4%
Supporting and developing local practice groups	38%	34%	17%	8%	3%
Hosting career advancing networking events	38%	33%	17%	9%	4%
Fostering events in my state/territory	35%	33%	19%	9%	4%
Hosting World Social Work Day events	36%	31%	18%	10%	5%
Hosting social connection networking events	33%	31%	20%	11%	5%

■ Very Important ■ Important ■ Moderately Important ■ Somewhat Important ■ Not Important At All

The data clearly indicates that advocacy and social justice efforts are the most valued functions of state branches, while networking and general event-hosting are seen as secondary priorities. This reinforces the need for branches to shift their focus toward policy influence, workforce advocacy, and professional development rather than broad community-building efforts.

1. **Advocacy is the Highest Priority.** The top two most important branch activities are advocating for professional issues (85%) and advancing social justice issues (84%) in members' states and territories. These activities had the lowest percentage of respondents who deemed them "not important", making it clear that members see branches as key drivers of advocacy. This supports previous findings that government engagement should be the central function of state branches, rather than broad social or networking events.

2. **Strong Support for Cultural & Reconciliation Activities.** Participation in NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week activities was rated highly, with nearly 75% of respondents marking them as important or very important. Given the strong emphasis on cultural responsiveness and Indigenous leadership in previous data, branches should continue prioritising these events, ensuring they are well-promoted, accessible, and impactful.

3. **Professional Growth Takes Priority Over Social Networking.** Members clearly prioritise career-advancing networking over general social networking. 71% rated career networking as important, compared to 64% for social connection networking events. Similarly, supporting and developing practice groups was rated higher than general networking, reinforcing the idea that members value branch activities that contribute to professional development rather than casual connections.

4. **World Social Work Day & State-Level Events Hold Moderate Importance.** While World Social Work Day and fostering state-based events were seen as valuable (66-69%), they ranked lower than direct advocacy efforts. This suggests that while these events remain important, they should be integrated into advocacy and professional development efforts, rather than serving as standalone social gatherings.

Effectiveness of Branch Activities (m=2505)

Activity	Very Effective	Effective	Moderately Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Effective At All	N/A
Hosting World Social Work Day events	10%	16%	15%	16%	14%	30%
Participation in and supporting NAIDOC activities	8%	14%	15%	15%	14%	34%
Participation in and supporting National Reconciliation Week activity	8%	14%	15%	15%	14%	34%
Supporting and developing local practice groups	10%	12%	14%	15%	18%	31%
Hosting social connection networking events	9%	12%	14%	15%	18%	32%
Hosting career advancing networking events	9%	12%	15%	15%	18%	32%
Advancing social justice issues in my state/territory	9%	12%	16%	16%	19%	29%
Advocating in my state/territory on matters impacting the profession	9%	12%	15%	15%	20%	28%
Fostering events in my state/territory	8%	12%	15%	15%	21%	30%

■ Very Effective ■ Effective ■ Moderately Effective ■ Somewhat Effective ■ Not Effective At All ■ N/A

The data suggests branch activities are not widely seen as effective, with low ratings across all areas. In nearly every category, less than a quarter of respondents found activities "Very Effective" or "Effective," while a significant proportion found them "Not Effective" or did not engage at all (N/A responses averaging 30%). This aligns with earlier findings that branches need to realign their focus to be more impactful and relevant to members.

1. **Advocacy and Social Justice Efforts Are Seen as More Effective but Still Underperforming**. Advocacy-related activities—advocating on professional issues (21% effective), advancing social justice issues (21%), and fostering events (19%)—scored slightly better than networking events, yet still fell well below expectations. The high "Not Effective" and "N/A" responses (20-30%) suggest that members either don't see tangible results from these efforts or are not aware of the advocacy work branches are doing.

2. **Cultural Engagement Has a High Disengagement Rate**. While NAIDOC and National Reconciliation Week activities remain valued by members in importance rankings, their effectiveness scores are low, with over a third of respondents (34%) selecting N/A. This suggests limited awareness or accessibility issues. Branches must find ways to make these initiatives more engaging, visible, and integrated into broader advocacy and professional development efforts.

3. **Networking and Career Advancement Events Lack Impact.** Both social networking and career-advancing networking events scored poorly in effectiveness. Only 21% of respondents found them effective, while 17-18% rated them as ineffective, and over 30% not at all. This reinforces the idea that members do not see broad networking as a priority - they want tangible professional benefits, targeted advocacy, and practical career support instead.

4. **World Social Work Day is Well-Known but Not Highly Effective.** Despite being one of the most attended events, World Social Work Day scored low on effectiveness (25% rated it effective), with 29% marking it as N/A. This suggests that while members attend, they may not see clear value in participation. To improve engagement, the event could be more advocacy-driven or offer CPD-related opportunities to increase its perceived impact.

DETAILED QUESTION ANALYSIS

Volunteering in Past 2 Years (n=2372)

DETAILED QUESTION ANALYSIS
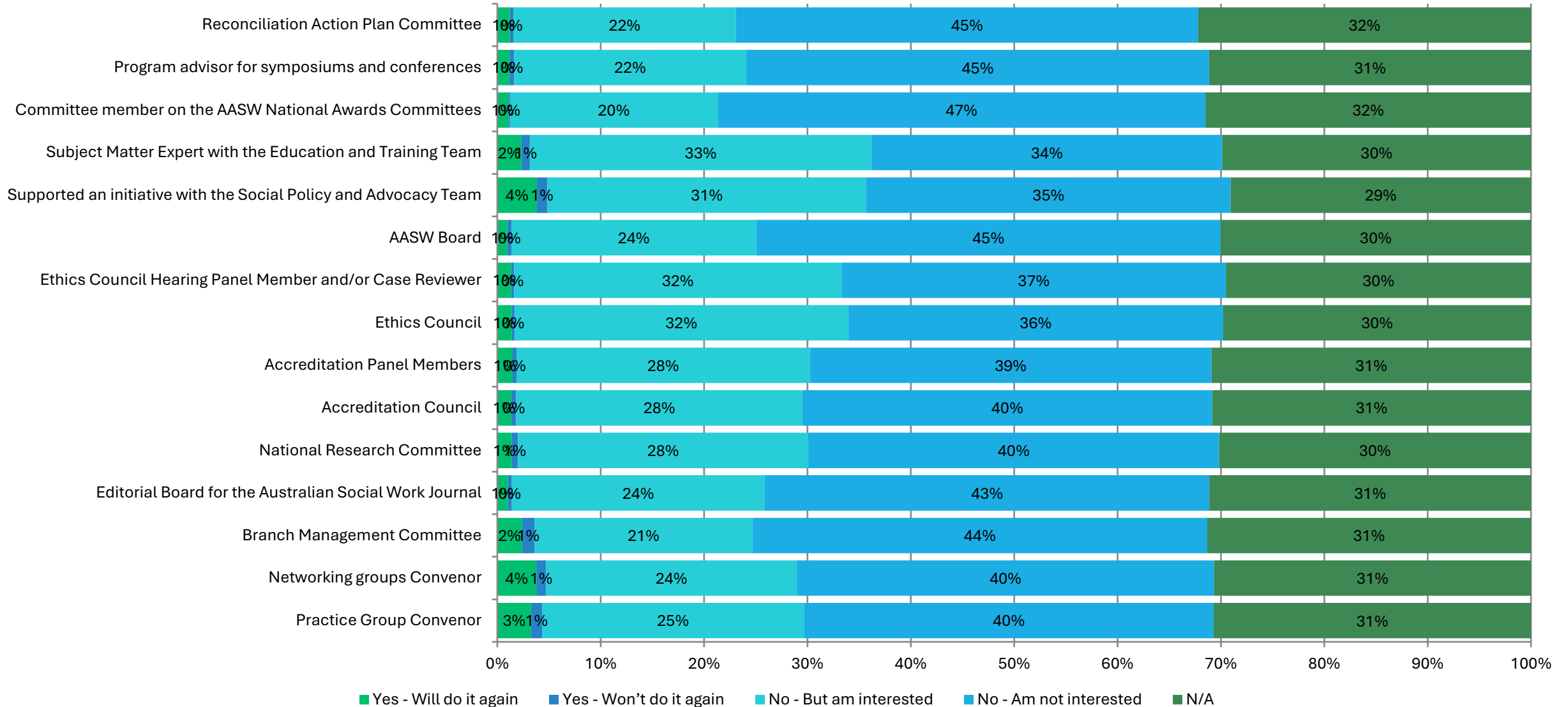
Volunteering

The data on member participation in AASW leadership and committee roles highlights low engagement levels, with most members either unaware of or uninterested in these opportunities. While there is some interest in involvement, barriers such as lack of time, awareness, and perceived relevance appear to be limiting participation.

1. **Low Participation in Leadership and Governance Roles.** Participation in AASW governance roles, such as the AASW Board, Branch Management Committee, Accreditation Panels, and Ethics Council, remains extremely low. Fewer than 4% of members report taking on leadership positions, and the vast majority have expressed no interest in doing so. For example, only 0.98% of respondents have served on the AASW Board, while 44.92% indicated no interest. Similarly, only 2.38% have participated in a Branch Management Committee, with over 43% uninterested.

2. **Moderate Interest in Policy and Advocacy Involvement.** Despite low participation, there is significant interest in advocacy-related opportunities. For example, over 30% of respondents expressed interest in working with the Social Policy and Advocacy Team, and 33% would consider serving as a Subject Matter Expert in Education and Training. This suggests that while members may not seek leadership roles, they are interested in contributing their expertise in meaningful ways.

3. **Minimal Involvement in Committees and Councils.** Committees such as the Accreditation Council, Ethics Council, and Research Committee also saw low engagement. Across all committees, participation rates were below 2%, with more than 35% of members expressing no interest. However, roughly a quarter of respondents indicated interest in roles such as Accreditation Panel Members and the Editorial Board for the Australian Social Work Journal.

4. **Strong Disengagement from Awards and Recognition Committees**. The lowest engagement was observed in the AASW National Awards Committees, with only 1.06% of respondents participating and 47% uninterested. Similarly, the Program Advisor role for symposiums and conferences had only 1.19% participation, with 44.78% indicating no interest.

5. **Mixed Interest in the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Committee**. The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Committee had slightly higher interest than other committees, with 21.55% interested in getting involved. However, 44.72% of members expressed no interest, suggesting that while members support the principles of reconciliation, they may not see direct value in engaging at the committee level..
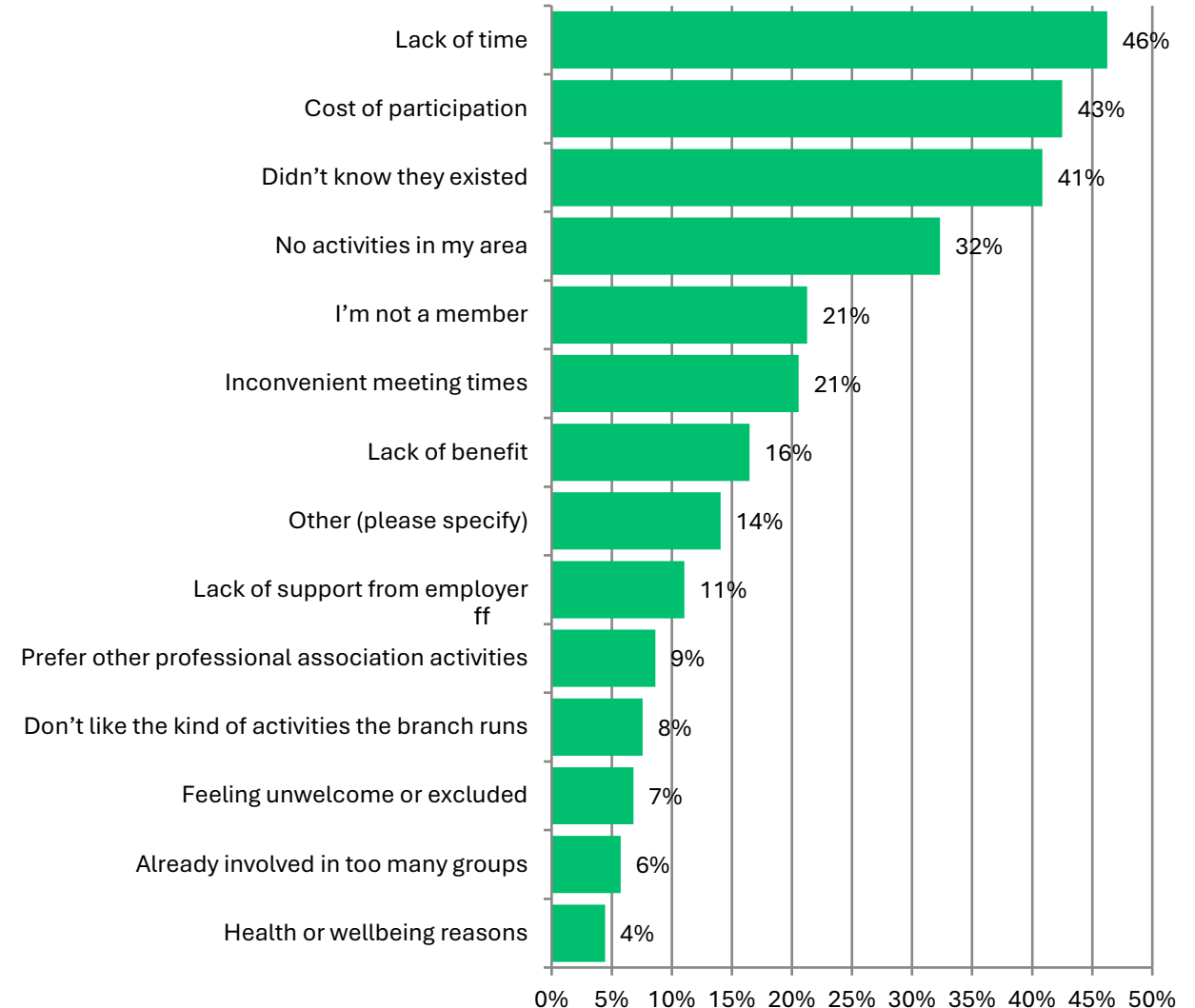
Summary of Comments This Question

1. **Low Awareness of Available Opportunities.** A recurring theme was a lack of visibility regarding AASW opportunities. Many members had never heard of most roles and committees, indicating poor communication and outreach. Several comments noted they would have considered participating if they had known these opportunities existed.

2. **Barriers to Participation: Time, Workload, and Accessibility.** Many respondents cited heavy workloads, study commitments, disability, and personal responsibilities as key reasons for not participating. Some also mentioned that employer support was lacking, making it difficult to engage in AASW activities.

3. **Disillusionment with Leadership and Governance.** There is significant distrust in AASW leadership, with multiple comments referencing poor governance, internal conflicts, and a lack of respect for member contributions. Some members mentioned past involvement but stated they would not participate again due to negative experiences.

4. **Interest in Advocacy and Policy Influence.** Despite low participation in committees, there was strong interest in advocacy and policy roles, particularly in areas such as NDIS reform, disability support, and social justice issues. Several members indicated they would be willing to contribute if they felt their input would lead to meaningful change.

5. **Concerns About Professional Recognition and Registration.** Many members expressed frustration with the slow progress toward social work registration, feeling that the AASW had not effectively advocated for professional recognition. Some also criticised the complexity and cost of accreditations, which they saw as a barrier to participation.

6. **Alternative Networks and Branch Disempowerment**. Several members noted that they had created or participated in alternative networking groups because they felt the AASW did not adequately support state branches or local communities. Some stated they had previously been engaged but became frustrated with the centralisation of decision-making.

DETAILED QUESTION ANALYSIS

The data highlights significant barriers preventing members from engaging in branch activities, with the top reasons being lack of time, cost, and awareness. These findings reinforce the need for branches to increase accessibility, improve communication, and offer more flexible, high-value activities.

1. **Time and Cost Are the Biggest Obstacles.** The most commonly cited barrier is lack of time (46%), followed closely by cost of participation (43%). This suggests that many social workers struggle to fit branch activities into their schedules or find them financially burdensome. To address this, branches should consider offering more flexible, low-cost, or online alternatives, ensuring accessibility for those with demanding work and personal commitments.

2. **Awareness and Accessibility Issues Limit Engagement**. A staggering 41% of respondents stated they "didn't know branch activities existed," while 32% reported no activities in their area. This indicates a major communication gap and a potential lack of branch presence in certain regions. Improving outreach, promotion, and digital engagement could significantly increase awareness and participation, especially for those who may not be physically close to a branch.

3. **Perceived Lack of Benefit and Interest in Alternative Associations**. 16% of respondents cited a lack of benefit, and 9% preferred other professional associations. This suggests that branches need to offer more compelling, professionally valuable opportunities that clearly differentiate them from other networks. Integrating CPD, career advancement support, and stronger advocacy efforts could increase perceived value.

4. **Structural Issues with Timing and Employer Support**. 21% of respondents were not members, and 20% cited inconvenient meeting times as a barrier. Additionally, 11% reported a lack of employer support, which could indicate that workplaces do not see value in branch engagement. To counteract this, branches should schedule more flexible, workplace-friendly events and strengthen advocacy for employer recognition of participation.

5. **Inclusivity and Event Relevance Need Improvement.** Though less common, 7% of respondents felt unwelcome or excluded, and 8% did not like the type of activities offered. While this is a smaller percentage, it still indicates a need for branches to ensure inclusivity and offer a broader range of relevant events that reflect the diverse needs of members.

Factors Inhibiting Branch Participation (n=2524)

Factor	Percentage
Lack of time	46%
Cost of participation	43%
Didn't know they existed	41%
No activities in my area	32%
I'm not a member	21%
Inconvenient meeting times	21%
Lack of benefit	16%
Other (please specify)	14%
Lack of support from employer ff	11%
Prefer other professional association activities	9%
Don't like the kind of activities the branch runs	8%
Feeling unwelcome or excluded	7%
Already involved in too many groups	6%
Health or wellbeing reasons	4%

Additional Comments About Branches

The 727 responses provided in the open-ended feedback question at the end of the branch section highlights significant concerns regarding the relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness of AASW branch activities, as well as broader dissatisfaction with membership value, advocacy efforts, and professional support. Below are the key themes that emerged:

1. **Cost and Perceived Lack of Value for Membership.** A recurring concern is the high cost of membership and the perception that it does not provide enough tangible benefits. Many social workers feel that they receive little value in return for their fees, especially given the additional costs of CPD, credentialing, and supervision. The comparison to other professional bodies (e.g., AHPRA, PACFA, APS) was frequently made, with frustration over the lack of employer recognition of AASW membership. Some members continue their membership only to maintain accreditation for Medicare rebates, while others have left due to financial constraints.

2. **Limited Awareness and Engagement with Branch Activities.** A substantial proportion of respondents indicated that they were not aware of local branch activities or did not know they existed. Many also reported that they had never been contacted by their local branch. There is a clear disconnect between members and branch communications, making it difficult for members to engage or find relevant opportunities.

3. **Lack of Accessibility and Inclusivity for Regional and Remote Members.** Members in regional and rural areas feel particularly disconnected from branch activities, which are often metro-centric or held at inconvenient times. The lack of in-person networking and CPD options outside of major cities is a major issue, especially for those who do not have employer support for travel.

4. **Need for Greater Advocacy on Workforce and Pay Equity Issues.** There is significant frustration about pay inequity, lack of professional recognition, and limited advocacy for social workers within the broader health and social services sector. Many members feel that AASW has not done enough to promote social work as a profession, particularly in NDIS, Medicare, and community services, where social workers are often undervalued compared to psychologists and occupational therapists.

5. **Calls for Professional Registration and Simplified Credentialing.** While some members are hesitant about mandatory registration, many view AHPRA registration as essential to achieving greater legitimacy, workforce protections, and pay parity. There is also frustration over the complexity and cost of multiple accreditations, particularly for Mental Health Social Work (AMHSW).

6. **The Perceived Shift Away from Social Justice and Grassroots Advocacy.** Many members feel that AASW has become overly bureaucratic and detached from grassroots social justice work. Some criticised the organisation's lack of visibility in political advocacy on issues such as youth justice, domestic violence, and Indigenous rights. There is also dissatisfaction with AASW's perceived silence on key global human rights issues, particularly the crisis in Palestine, which has led some members to leave.

7. **Challenges with CPD, Website Usability, and Member Support.** Multiple respondents criticised the AASW website, describing it as difficult to navigate and frustrating to use for logging CPD, finding events, or managing membership details. Additionally, members reported that CPD offerings are expensive and often lack depth, leading them to seek external training.

About the Author

Belinda Moore from Strategic Membership Solutions is an internationally recognised expert in association strategy and membership innovation. With over 25 years of experience, she has partnered with thousands of not-for-profit organisations across the globe to tackle their challenges. Whether transforming membership models, facilitating strategic planning, or driving engagement, Belinda's proven strategies deliver tangible results. A passionate researcher, Belinda frequently undertakes practical research projects for her association clients, delivering actionable insights that empower leaders to make informed decisions and drive meaningful change. Her work focuses on uncovering trends, opportunities, and solutions that help associations navigate the evolving landscape with confidence. Her engaging and energetic style has made her a sought-after keynote speaker. In her presentations, Belinda combines deep industry knowledge with practical insights, ensuring her audiences leave equipped with ideas they can immediately apply.

Belinda is the author of numerous books and whitepapers. Her works explore the evolution of associations, offering actionable guidance for navigating the opportunities and disruptions shaping the sector. Some of these include Evolving Association Membership Models (2024); Association Annie: Herding Cats (2019); Navigating the AI Revolution (June 2023); Associations Evolve (2021); Rise! Empowering Australian workers through the collective spirit and energy of unions (2021); COVID-19: Lessons for Associations (2020); Association Apocalypse (2019); Membership Managers' Handbook (2018); Small Association Turnarounds – A Step-by-Step Approach Whitepaper (2016); and Membership is Dead Whitepaper (2012)

Belinda's commitment to empowering associations extends beyond consulting and writing. She is passionate about building global initiatives, such as the Global Association Research Initiative, fostering collaboration and insights to ensure associations around the world remain resilient and future-ready.

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