

AASW Psychedelic Assisted Therapy Position Statement

This Position Statement outlines the AASW's current position regarding psychedelic assisted therapy (PAT), including the profession's ethical responsibilities, regulatory considerations, and the emerging role of social workers in this developing field.

1. Commitment to Evidence-Based and Ethical Practice

The AASW supports the development of safe, evidence-informed and ethically grounded approaches to mental health care, particularly where existing treatment options may be inadequate for people experiencing severe or treatment-resistant mental health conditions.

Social workers are professionally and ethically committed to promoting wellbeing, reducing harm, advancing human rights, and supporting recovery-oriented and person-centred approaches to care. The AASW therefore recognises the importance of continued research into innovative therapeutic interventions, including PAT.

The AASW supports ongoing clinical research into PAT, including strengthened expectations that Australian research more explicitly includes and reports on the roles, contributions, and outcomes relevant to social workers where they are engaged in studies or clinical settings.

2. Multidisciplinary Care and the Role of Social Work

The AASW recognises that effective, ethical, and equitable mental health care requires genuinely multidisciplinary approaches.

Where mental health services are delivered within regulated environments, social workers may contribute unique expertise through psychosocial assessment, trauma-informed therapeutic engagement, relational and recovery-oriented care, advocacy, culturally responsive practice, family and systems work, and integration and long-term psychosocial support.

The AASW believes social work perspectives are particularly important in ensuring that care remains relational, socially contextualised, culturally responsive, and oriented toward long-term wellbeing beyond the immediate clinical intervention.

3. Recognition of a Developing Practice Area

PAT refers to the use of psychedelic substances within structured clinical settings, combined with psychotherapy, to support therapeutic change.

In Australia, the principal substances currently associated with PAT are:

- MDMA-assisted therapy for treatment-resistant Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD); and
- Psilocybin-assisted therapy for treatment-resistant depression.

These substances were rescheduled by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) in 2023 from Schedule 9 (prohibited substances) to Schedule 8 (controlled medicines) under tightly regulated conditions.

The AASW acknowledges that clinical research into PAT has progressed significantly in recent years, with studies indicating potential therapeutic benefits for some individuals experiencing treatment-resistant mental health conditions.

However, understanding of the long-term efficacy, safety, mechanisms of change, and broader psychosocial implications of PAT remains limited. Additionally, evidence concerning specific models of care, including the role and contribution of social workers is limited. Finally, regulation in the space is still developing, and is lacking for self-regulated professions.

4. Current Scope of Social Work Practice

The AASW's current position is that PAT sits outside the formally defined scope of social work practice under existing AASW standards and practice frameworks.

Prescribing of psychedelic substances in Australia is restricted to psychiatrists who hold:

- Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) Authorised Prescriber status;
- Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval; and
- Relevant Schedule 8 compliance.

Social workers are not authorised prescribers under the Therapeutic Goods Act 1989.

As of May 2026, the TGA has updated its recommendations regarding Authorised Prescriber (AP) status. Part of the assessment of AP status for psychiatrist includes the assessment of the two therapists involved in delivering PAT, in addition to the psychiatrist. These recommendations have excluded social workers (including AMHSW) and other self-regulating professions as lead therapists due to concerns about lack of regulation and governance.

At present, there are no nationally accredited PAT training pathways recognised by the AASW, no established AASW practice standards specific to PAT, no inclusion of PAT within social work education standards, limited regulatory clarity regarding social work involvement in PAT delivery, and no confirmed professional indemnity coverage for social workers engaging in PAT-specific clinical practice. AASW professional indemnity insurance does not currently cover social workers engaged in PAT practice.

AASW recognises that some social workers have undertaken additional training in PAT. However, individuals with a social work qualification and additional PAT training are nonetheless working outside the currently defined social work scope of practice.

5. Ethical and Professional Considerations

The AASW recognises that some social workers are already involved in PAT-related activities across a range of settings, including:

- integration therapy;
- psychosocial assessment;
- co-therapy within clinical trials; and
- post-experience therapeutic support.

The AASW supports thoughtful engagement with new and developing areas of practice where these align with community need, self-determination, innovation in mental health care, and improved therapeutic outcomes.

However, innovation must be balanced with the profession's ethical obligations relating to client safety, informed consent, trauma-informed and culturally responsive practice, risk management, professional accountability, and adherence to evidence-informed standards.

PAT raises significant questions for the social work profession relating to safety, ethics, scope of practice, governance, evidence, equity, accessibility, and professional accountability.

The AASW is particularly concerned that members may currently be operating within a developing field without:

- clearly defined professional scope;
- consistent access to professional indemnity coverage;
- nationally recognised training standards; or
- profession-specific practice guidance.

All members of the AASW are expected to maintain their obligations under the Code of Ethics and Practice Standards.

6. Research, Regulation and Future Development

The AASW supports ongoing, rigorous and transparent research into PAT, including investigation into long-term safety and efficacy, potential harms and adverse outcomes, impacts on vulnerable populations, ethical and governance considerations, accessibility and equity, culturally safe practice approaches, and the role of psychosocial and therapeutic interventions within PAT models.

The AASW also supports continued collaboration with governments, regulators, researchers, psychiatrists, psychologists, allied health professionals, and lived experience communities to monitor developments in the field.

As the evidence base, regulatory environment, and professional standards evolve, the AASW will continue to review its position and consider future guidance for the profession. Social work brings a distinct person-in-environment lens to the treatment of mental health in Australia, grounded in human rights, cultural safety and social justice. The AASW therefore calls for policy processes on psychedelic-assisted therapy to meaningfully include social work expertise from the outset to ensure that this unique perspective is included.

7. Current AASW Position Summary

At this time, the AASW recognises PAT as a developing area of mental health practice and supports ongoing evidence-based research in the field. The AASW acknowledges that some social workers are already engaged in PAT-related support roles; however, PAT is not currently recognised as within the formally defined scope of social work practice under existing AASW standards. The AASW therefore advises caution in relation to the legal, ethical, professional and insurance risks associated with PAT-related practice and commits to continued monitoring, consultation and review as evidence, regulation and professional frameworks develop.

Conclusion

The AASW acknowledges the growing interest in PAT and the hope they may offer some people experiencing severe and treatment-resistant mental health conditions.

At the same time, the AASW emphasises the importance of evidence-informed, ethical, safe and professionally accountable practice.

Given the evolving nature of the evidence base, the absence of profession-specific standards and training standards, and unresolved questions regarding scope of practice and professional indemnity coverage, the AASW considers a cautious and measured approach necessary.

The AASW will continue to engage with members, researchers, regulators and interdisciplinary stakeholders to monitor developments in this field and ensure that any future social work engagement in PAT remains consistent with the profession's ethical obligations, practice standards, and commitment to the wellbeing and safety of individuals and communities.