

Our progress report to members

July to September 2026 | Quarter 1 of our July 2026-June 2027 Strategy

A note from our National President and CEO

Social workers are facing increasing demands, growing complexity and significant pressures across the profession. You need an association that understands these challenges, stands alongside you and advocates for the recognition and support you deserve.

We're pleased to report that work is underway across all nine of our strategic priority areas. This quarter, we've kept membership fees unchanged, strengthened professional connections and increased our engagement with government on issues affecting social workers.

We recognise that rebuilding trust requires meaningful action and sustained progress. Some important changes, particularly greater member involvement in decisions, are still in their early stages.

Next quarter, we'll focus on expanding professional support, strengthening advocacy and creating more opportunities for members to influence the profession's future.

Elizabeth (Liz) Little, National President and Kerryn Pennell, CEO

This quarter at a glance

Our strategy has 29 actions across nine areas. Here's where each one stood at the end of September 2026.



What changed for you

- You could connect with other social workers through 31 Practice Groups, 16 Networking Groups and 61 Branch and national events.
- We started Schwartz Rounds, a space for social workers to talk through the emotional side of the job. Two of six rounds were completed with 69 participants in total.
- Your membership fees didn't go up on 1 July 2026.

Coming up next quarter

- We will finish our Reconciliation Action Plan. We will also keep working with First Nations social workers and communities to establish our First Nations Member Engagement Strategy including Board hosted Yarning Circle and First Nations Forum at our Social Work Congress.
- We will agree with the Board by early 2027 how we'll run a national conversation with members about professional recognition.
- We'll add staff to the Social Work Advisory Service so it's easier to get practice advice when you need it.
- An independent team will start working out what it really costs to deliver social work services. We'll use the results to push for fair pay and funding.
- When you're on leave from practice and eligible, you're still covered by our professional indemnity insurance, subject to policy terms. We'll tell you about this.

Have your say

Tell us what you think of this report and what you want to see in the next one. Email editor@asw.asn.au. We'll tell you what we heard in our next report.

How to read the detail

Every action in our strategy has a status, shown in the second column of each table.

Done	Finished, or the commitment for this strategy has been met.
Underway	Work has started and there's something real to show for it.
Not started yet	Nothing has happened yet. We say why, and when it will start.
Paused	We've deliberately put this on hold. We say why.

Our impact

The difference we want to make for the profession this year.

Stand up for the social work profession

Social workers are recognised, fairly compensated, and valued for our scope of practice.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Convene a national discussion on professional recognition to resolve the best way forward.	Underway	We've started planning with the Board how to run a national conversation with members on professional recognition. Next quarter We'll agree with the Board how we'll consult members.
Explore compensation and funding mechanisms for social work.	Underway	We're commissioning an independent analysis of the cost of delivering social work services. It will look at a sustainable hourly rate for independent practitioners and what it costs organisations to employ social workers. We'll use the findings to make the case for fair pay and funding to governments, insurers and funders. Next quarter Proposals from consultants will be sought and the analysis starts.
Commence a review of the code of ethics, practice standards and capability statements.	Underway	We're planning a full review of the Code of Ethics and Practice Standards in 2027. Work on the capability statements will be a component of the ASWEAS full review scheduled for 2027. Next quarter No action in the next quarter, the timeline and scope will be agreed early 2027.

No social worker stands alone

Social workers have access to peer support and professional guidance when they need it most.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Enhance the social worker practitioner-led support line.	Underway	We're recruiting more staff for the Social Work Advisory Service so more members can get practice advice and support. Next quarter The new staff start and the Service can take more calls.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Enhance the insurance offering for members.	Underway	<p>We checked members' professional indemnity insurance and confirmed that eligible members in the <i>On Leave</i> category are still covered, subject to policy terms. We've added this to the <i>On Leave</i> framework.</p> <p>Next quarter We will publish clear information about your insurance cover when you step away from practice.</p>
Deliver useful, accessible practitioner resources.	Underway	<p>We wrote fact sheets explaining the new definition of a social worker in aged care legislation. We updated our Accredited Mental Health Social Worker materials for GPs, so more GPs know what you can offer.</p> <p>Next quarter We'll publish the aged care fact sheets on the website and determine priority resources and the best approach to engage with members.</p>
Create solutions to enable practitioner personal safety.	Not started yet	<p>We haven't started this yet. We want to talk to the right people first, so we get the approach right. We expect to start in early 2027.</p> <p>Next quarter We will engage with members, the profession more broadly and subject matter experts to identify key issues and determine the best approach to respond.</p>

A social work voice where decisions are made

Social work expertise shapes the policies that affect the people social workers serve.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Advance a structured government and stakeholder engagement plan.	Underway	<p>We now have a plan for who we meet in government and the sector, and why. We met the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). We raised concerns about how social workers are recognised in the NDIS and talked about what the profession can offer as the scheme changes. The NDIA CEO invited us to meet regularly. We also created a new <i>Government Relations and Advocacy Officer</i> role to do more of this work.</p> <p>Next quarter We have requested meetings with the Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Aged Care.</p>
Create a framework and process for policy development and positioning.	Done	<p>We finished a new process for developing our position statements. It makes our policy positions more consistent and better evidenced, which gives our advocacy more weight.</p> <p>Next quarter We'll use it to write a public position statement on social work in aged care.</p>
Drive conversations on the issues that matter to social workers.	Underway	<p>We made submissions to 12 government consultations on disability, Medicare, aged care and veterans' services. Each one argued for social work to be recognised and for the needs of the people social workers support. We met with government directly and worked with ACOSS, AHPA, and others on housing, compulsory income management and allied health funding.</p> <p>CEO Kerryn Pennell was interviewed in the research phase of ABC TV's Four Corners investigation into services for veterans. We</p>

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
		<p>worked with the Department of Veterans' Affairs on ethical billing and administration, and supported members who came to us for advice.</p> <p>We wrote a discussion paper for our English Language Policy review, ready for consultation with members and the sector. The results will shape the English language requirements for social workers migrating to Australia and guide universities. The aim is that every social worker is ready to practice from day one, whether they trained here or overseas.</p> <p>Next quarter We'll develop and publish practical resources for members on billing and administration. An English Language Policy discussion paper and survey will be shared for consultation with members and the sector.</p>

Key shifts

The changes we want members to see us make this year.

From division to connection

We connect the profession rather than talking at it.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Reimagine, activate and support member-led communities and branches.	Underway	<p>Members ran 31 Practice Groups and 16 Networking Groups. Branches held 54 events and we ran seven national events. Highlights included the Tasmanian Social Work Symposium, Shaping What Comes Next, forums in the ACT, Darwin and Alice Springs, and two new groups, the ACT Anti-Racist Social Work Practice Group and the Victorian Youth Mental Health Practice Group.</p> <p>We started reviewing how we support Branches, to cut the paperwork for Branch volunteers. We set up an Innovation Fund so Branches can fund local projects.</p> <p>We opened applications for student bursaries to attend Social Work Congress 2026. Branch Presidents and members are also planning to lead a session at Congress on social work's scope of practice.</p> <p>Next quarter We'll make it easier for Branches to get support, fund the first Innovation Fund projects and hold the member-led session on scope of practice at Congress.</p>
Build strong mentoring networks.	Underway	<p>Our Mentoring Program matched 298 mentors and mentees in 2025–26. It brings together students, graduates and experienced practitioners to support each other's careers and confidence. Mentors and mentees in the current six-month program kept meeting through the quarter.</p> <p>We also started Schwartz Rounds. Two of six rounds have been completed with 69 participants in total. These give social workers a space for reflective practice, peer support and shared professional learning focusing on the emotional side of practice. Recent sessions looked at finding meaning in stretched systems and keeping compassion going under pressure.</p>

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
		<p>16 Networking Group meetings were hosted by Branches to provide opportunities for networking at a local level.</p> <p>Next quarter The current mentoring round finishes. We'll ask participants what worked and use it to plan the next round. We will complete the six Schwartz Rounds and finalise the external evaluation to inform future rounds.</p>
Review the membership model and foundations.	Not started yet	<p>The review has been deferred to prioritise stabilising core membership operations, improving payment processes and addressing existing service issues before considering broader changes to the membership model. This reflects a focus on fixing the foundations before pursuing reform.</p> <p>Next quarter No action in the next quarter, we'll start the review in Q3 (January to March 2027), with findings and recommendations completed by June 2027.</p>
Embed a clear focus on working with First Nations social workers and community.	Underway	<p>We invited First Nations social workers, members or not, to meet with our First Nations Board members. Together they're helping shape our First Nations Member Engagement Strategy, our Reconciliation Action Plan and plans for Social Work Congress 2026.</p> <p>167 people registered for our national NAIDOC Week Virtual Fireside Chat. Dr Josephine Lee and Tim Donovan talked about the theme "50 Years of Deadly", Aboriginal perspectives and storytelling, and why NAIDOC Week matters.</p> <p>We approved 11 scholarships so First Nations social workers can attend Social Work Congress 2026.</p> <p>Next quarter Finish our Reconciliation Action Plan, keep developing the First Nations Member Engagement Strategy with First Nations social workers and support our 11 scholarship recipients to attend Congress.</p>

From surveying to hearing

When members tell us something, we respond, we act, and we show what changed.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Establish inclusive consultation, feedback, and follow-up mechanisms to enable input into association decision-making.	Underway	<p>We started building ways for members to have a real say in our decisions. First Nations members met directly with First Nations Board members and AASW leaders (see <i>From division to connection</i>). We know we still need regular, reliable ways to ask for your views, respond and report back. Board subcommittees have been finalised including terms of reference and membership.</p> <p>Next quarter We'll develop a plan for how we ask for your views, respond and report back. Board subcommittees will meet.</p>
Overhaul the communications, engagement, and events to support responsive,	Underway	<p>We commissioned an independent review of how our communications work. The first phase finished in September.</p> <p>We refreshed our look and design, developed in-house, and includes our communications, website, programs and resources. It</p>

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
transparent, two-way engagement.		<p>also strengthens our professional presence when representing social workers to governments, employers, the media and other stakeholders.</p> <p>We introduced tailored communications for early career members and Branch Update newsletters.</p> <p>We reviewed the automatic emails and texts we send you, to fix errors and cut the ones you don't need.</p> <p>See <i>Digital evolution and enablement</i> for an update about our plans for the website.</p> <p>Next quarter We will start reviewing our emails, webpages, forms and resources to make them clearer and easier to use.</p>

From silence to voice

We show up in public debate, media, and the halls of power on the issues that matter.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Recruit and brief a roster of social work practitioners available for media commentary.	Underway	<p>We're building a group of social workers who can talk to the media about the issues they know.</p> <p>Board members and Branch Presidents did media training, and we identified possible spokespeople and their areas of expertise. This means we can connect journalists with social workers who know the issue first-hand.</p> <p>Next quarter We'll start adding more Social Work Practitioners to the panel.</p>
Commit to a visible, sustained approach to advocacy and public relations with fewer issues, greater depth, and consistent presence.	Underway	<p>We set up a way to choose fewer advocacy issues and stick with them for longer. Using it, we've met decision makers on the NDIS, social work in mental health, the Department of Veterans' Affairs and other areas where social workers practise.</p> <p>Next quarter We've asked to meet the Minister for Social Services and the Minister for Aged Care about issues affecting social workers.</p>

Foundational fixes

What we need to fix inside our organisation to deliver all of this.

People, culture, and performance

Change only works if the people delivering it are capable, well supported and clear on what's expected.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Enhance organisational capability and resilience.	Underway	<p>We appointed two experienced social workers to our executive team, <i>Alisa Hall, Director Social Work Advancement</i> and <i>Louise Butler, Director Professional Standards and Regulation</i>. Both have long careers in social work practice and leadership. We also hired</p>

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
		social workers into ethics, migration assessment and government relations roles. Next quarter We'll recruit leads for both areas.
In conjunction with the staff, develop and implement organisational values and behaviours.	Underway	After our annual staff culture survey, we set up a staff working group to find practical ways to live our values in how we work and make decisions. Its focus is collaboration and accountability, so you get quicker, more joined-up help from us. Next quarter The staff working group gives its improvement plan to the executive team.
Build in cultural safety and resilience.	Underway	Our work with First Nations social workers this quarter is in <i>From division to connection</i> . Next quarter We will review our cultural safety and resilience training for our staff.
Grow staff empathy and understanding of the profession, and leadership development.	Underway	Our CEO has led discussions with all staff about the social work profession and what social workers deal with day to day. Staff who are social workers now meet regularly, and we draw on them directly when we need social work expertise. We are recruiting more social workers through the establishment of the Social Work Advancement portfolio to embed a better understanding of the profession with all staff. Next quarter A staff working group will draw up a plan to help all staff understand the profession and put members first.

Digital evolution and enablement

Fix what's broken. Stop investing in what doesn't work. Build the foundation for better decisions.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Rationalise the CRM (<i>our Customer Relationship Management platform that's behind MyAASW</i>) and technology solutions.	Underway	We started looking at all our software to find where we're paying twice for the same thing and where our core systems could work better. The aim is to spend less and make things work better for you. We renegotiated the contract for the system behind MyAASW and dropped features we no longer needed. Next quarter We'll sign a new 12-month contract for the system behind MyAASW that cuts its cost by about 20%.
Ensure the website delivers an exceptional user experience.	Underway	We know our website is hard to use. An audit identified outdated content, broken links, inconsistent layouts, navigation difficulties and technical issues that make the site difficult to maintain. These findings will inform the development of a new website, making it easier for members to find information and access services. Stay tuned – we will ask for your input in coming months. Next quarter We will begin scoping the new website project, including reviewing what needs to change and planning the work ahead.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Adopt and integrate AI responsibly and in ways that will enhance our effectiveness and the member experience.	Not started yet	<p>We haven't started this yet. We want clear rules in place before we use AI more widely, especially after our website chatbot gave wrong information (see <i>What we've paused or stopped</i>).</p> <p>Next quarter We'll start writing rules for how we use AI, and look at where AI tools could save time or make things better for members.</p>

Governance and financial sustainability

Demonstrate that the organisation is well run, financially sound, ethical, and accountable.

Action	Status	What happened and what's next
Review Board governance processes, policies, and frameworks to enhance Board effectiveness.	Underway	<p>We updated our Bylaws to make Board and Branch elections fairer and more open. The changes include clearer rules on conflicts of interest, more independent oversight of elections and clearer steps for raising concerns and reviewing decisions.</p> <p>Our Company Secretary now supports Branches with governance.</p> <p>The Board agreed the terms of reference and membership, including independent experts, for four new Board subcommittees.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Regulation Committee • Social Work Advancement Committee • People & Culture Committee • Finance, Audit & Risk Committee <p>Next quarter The four subcommittees hold their first meetings.</p>
Ensure the association maintains adequate financial reserves, effective and ethical investment strategy, and auditing.	Underway	<p>We set a balanced budget for 2026–27 and kept membership fees the same from 1 July 2026.</p> <p>Our 2025–26 accounts have been audited. You'll find the results in our 2025–26 Annual Report.</p> <p>We recruited a Chief Operating Officer (COO) with strong financial expertise.</p> <p>Next quarter Our new COO starts.</p>
Ensure the Board has access to the right expertise and capabilities to advance social work.	Underway	<p>The Board can now draw on independent experts through its four new subcommittees (see the <i>Board governance</i> action above).</p> <p>Next quarter The Board will complete induction and development training with a specialist governance trainer.</p>
Ensure all the regulatory functions that are under contract or for a fee are covering their costs.	Underway	<p>We're auditing the real cost of our accreditation work, which checks that university social work courses meet our education standards (ASWEAS). Once we know the true cost, we can make sure the right budgets pay for it.</p> <p>Next quarter We'll check the costs of all our other regulatory services the same way, including what it costs to meet government and legal requirements.</p>

What we've paused or stopped (outside of the strategic priorities)

- We paused our website chatbot after we found it was sometimes giving wrong information.
- We put off buying any major new technology so we can fix and simplify the systems we already have.

Find out more about the strategy

Read our [July 2026 to June 2027 Strategy](#).