

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: TRENDS IN SOCIAL WORK, AI, AND THE AASW'S ADVOCACY.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We respectfully acknowledge the past and present Traditional Owners and ongoing Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, their ancestors and their families.

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National President's report: the future of social work



JULIANNE WHYTE OAM

AASW National President

Social work has always been a forward-looking profession. While rooted in values of justice, dignity and care, we have consistently embraced new approaches to better serve individuals, families and communities. Our history shows a strong, often early, uptake of innovations that align with our ethical foundations.

In Australia, this includes the integration of Indigenous-led approaches since the 1970s, such as the establishment of the Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA), formerly known as the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency. These models have placed cultural safety, self-determination and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's governance at the heart of child and family service, an enduring example of our profession's responsiveness and allyship.

The 1980s saw the widespread adoption of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, a model developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg. Social workers were among the first to embrace its practical, strength-based methods to empower clients and achieve meaningful change.

By the 1990s, Australian social workers were at the forefront of trauma-informed practice, particularly in supporting survivors of family violence and people from refugee backgrounds. This shift fundamentally changed how services are delivered, embedding safety, choice and collaboration into the core of therapeutic work.

More recently, the rise of green social work (an approach that integrates environmental concerns and social work principles) has seen our profession link environmental and social justice, developing holistic responses to climate

disasters and displacement, particularly following Australia's increasingly frequent bushfires and floods.

These examples are not isolated. They demonstrate our profession's willingness to adapt, to lead, and to engage critically with change. Innovation in social work is about responding to emerging needs with integrity, compassion and courage.

Today, we stand at another turning point.

Technology, including artificial intelligence (AI), is reshaping the world we live in. These tools are already influencing the way services are delivered, how people access support, and how professionals work and communicate. In this edition of *Social Work Focus*, we explore the future of the profession: the risks, possibilities and responsibilities that come with technological change.

There are clear benefits to embracing new tools. AI and digital platforms can improve efficiency, reduce administrative burden, support decision-making and expand access to services for people in remote or marginalised communities. Some members are already using digital tools to enhance reflective practice, access supervision remotely, or tailor support to client preferences. Technology can also help amplify client voices, foster collaboration, and reduce the time spent on repetitive or compliance-based tasks.

These benefits must be weighed against real concerns. Privacy, data misuse, bias in algorithms, and the potential erosion of human-centred care are not hypothetical risks, they are challenges already emerging across health and human services. We must also be alert to issues of equity, especially where

digital tools widen the gap for those with limited access to technology or stable internet. The risk of deskilling, burnout, or depersonalised relationships cannot be ignored.

Social workers bring a unique perspective to this conversation, one grounded in ethics, rights and relational practice. We are not just users of technology; we are advocates and change agents. Our role is not simply to accept or reject innovation, but to shape it in ways that serve our communities.

I encourage you to read the reflections, provocations and practice insights in this edition with curiosity and care. Whether you are enthusiastic about new tools or cautious about their implications, your voice is vital as we navigate this next chapter.

Our future is not just something we face, it's something we shape, together.

Warm regards,

Julianne Whyte OAM
National President

•

CEO's report: looking to the future, together



CINDY SMITH

Chief Executive Officer

This edition of *Social Work Focus* explores emerging trends. Our theme invites considered reflection on what's next for social work, from the mostly unknown implications of artificial intelligence to fresh ideas from the next generation of practitioners.

This issue explores the future of social work, including the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI). AI is already dramatically changing how we work, from streamlining documentation to supporting communication and service planning. AI is increasingly being tailored to support professionals in social work and allied health. Beyond general-purpose tools like ChatGPT, there is now a growing range of bespoke AI platforms designed to streamline case management, enhance clinical decision-making, improve access to mental health support, and support administrative tasks.

Tools such as Wysa, Zuri, Corti and Carepatron demonstrate the breadth of innovation, from AI-powered chatbots for psychosocial support, to diagnostic aids and practice management platforms. AI should be embraced thoughtfully, so that emerging technologies enhance rather than replace the empathy, ethics and critical thinking that lie at the heart of our profession.

In response to strong member interest, we recently hosted a dedicated webinar on the topic of national registration, which attracted over 950

registrations, a testament to the passion and engagement of our professional community. A highlight of the session was Jim Arneman ASM, Intensive Care Paramedic and Duty Officer (Operations) with ACT Ambulance Service. Jim's reflections on the paramedic journey to national registration in 2018 provided valuable insights as we continue to advocate for the same recognition for social workers.

We also marked a number of significant cultural and historical days over the past two months, including National Sorry Day, the anniversary of the 1967 Referendum, Mabo Day and NAIDOC Week. Many AASW members around the country attended our webinar, highlighting the strength, history and continued contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As part of these commemorations, we invited you to join us for a webinar featuring Dr Christine Fejo-King, a proud Aboriginal social worker, policy leader and advocate for Indigenous self-determination. Dr Fejo-King shared clear insights drawn from her decades of experience in the Northern Territory.

I also want to acknowledge advocacy efforts, making a real difference across policy, practice, and legislative reform. Recent outcomes include the recognition of Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs) by Medibank, a major step forward in private health sector access, and the AASW's new position on the National Mental Health

Workforce Sector Advisory Group. These tireless efforts across a wide range of policy and practice issues are creating meaningful impact for the profession and the communities we serve.

Warm regards,

Cindy Smith
Chief Executive Officer

AASW Summit on family violence announced for November 2025

Lyra Taylor Social Work Impact Summit – Beyond response: proactive social work in family violence. Thursday 20 November 2025, InterContinental Sydney.

This November, the social work community will come together in Sydney for a new event on the social work calendar, the **Lyra Taylor Social Work Impact Summit**. This summit honours the legacy of Lyra Taylor, a pioneering figure in Australian social work and a founding member of the AASW. Her dedication to professional excellence and innovation continues to inspire generations of social workers, and her vision forms the heart of this important gathering.

The 2025 Summit is the first in a national series of **Lyra Taylor Social Work Impact Summits**, with the intention to hold future events across Australia. These summits form part of the AASW's flagship initiatives leading into its 80th anniversary in 2026, reinforcing our commitment to leadership and transformative social work.

The theme for the 2025 Summit is "Beyond response: proactive social work in family violence". This year's program recognises that social workers are not only frontline responders in family and domestic violence (FDV) but also leaders in prevention, recovery, and systemic reform.

Across Australia, FDV continues to take a devastating toll on communities. One in five Australian adults has experienced physical or sexual family violence, and women and children are disproportionately affected. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, in particular, face rates of violence up to 80 times higher than non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women in some regions.

The Summit will highlight how social workers can lead change in this space by integrating evidence-informed practice with trauma-informed, survivor-centred approaches. Attendees will explore how to engage perpetrators in accountability, strengthen safety

planning, and drive reform through cross-sector collaboration. Sessions will also address the unique barriers faced by marginalised groups, including LGBTQIA+ communities and people with disability.

With a full day of programming, the Summit will include keynote presentations and panel discussions led by frontline practitioners, researchers, sector leaders, and lived experience advocates. The event concludes with a cocktail reception and the National Excellence Awards ceremony, recognising outstanding contributions to the profession.



ABOUT LYRA TAYLOR

Lyra Taylor was instrumental in shaping social work practices in Australia through her work in policy reform and advocacy. Her groundbreaking contributions to the Commonwealth Department of Social Services in 1944 laid the foundation for progressive, community-driven social work practices. The Lyra Taylor Social Work Impact Summit is a thought leadership platform designed to explore social justice, policy reform, collaborative solutions for inequity, and strategies to empower marginalised communities. It will bring together thought leaders, practitioners, and policymakers to drive action and inspire innovation in addressing society's most critical challenges.

REGISTER YOUR PLACE

The 2025 Lyra Taylor Social Work Impact Summit will be held at the InterContinental Sydney on Thursday 20 November 2025. This is an opportunity to connect with colleagues, share expertise, and re-energise our collective commitment.

Learn more at
aasw.asn.au/summit

SAVE
THE DATE



LYRA TAYLOR SOCIAL WORK IMPACT SUMMIT

Beyond response: proactive social work in family violence

20 November 2025
InterContinental Sydney



The Lyra Taylor Social Work Impact Summit is the AASW's new national platform for transformative social work. Proudly named after Lyra Taylor, each summit will honour her legacy of perseverance, innovation and an unwavering dedication to social justice.

As we approach the AASW's 80th anniversary, this inaugural summit – **Beyond response: proactive social work in family violence** – will bring together social workers, policymakers, advocates, researchers, and community voices to address one of Australia's most urgent issues: family and domestic violence.

Be one of the first 70 registrations to access our special introductory rate.

Learn more at aasw.asn.au/summit

The Advanced Supervision Program: a deep dive into advanced practice



The AASW has developed the Advanced Supervision Program in direct response to the recommendations outlined in Coronial, Royal Commission, and State Ombudsman reports. These reports underscored the critical need for advanced supervision in frontline social work and highlighted gaps in supervision training and support.

This is the AASW's flagship, award-winning supervision program, designed specifically for experienced social workers looking to deepen their capability, confidence, and ethical practice as supervisors.

Over the past two years, more than 400 social workers have completed the program, with overwhelmingly positive feedback.

"As a current supervisor, it was great to have some formalised training on what I have already been doing which will allow me to hopefully become a better supervisor as I impart the information and knowledge gained in this training."

Award recognition



AITD Excellence Award – Best Blended Learning Solution (Finalist)



LearnX Awards – Best Learning Model (Diamond Winner)



LearnX Awards – Best Learning & Talent Development (Diamond Winner)

About the program

This immersive 8-week program is designed for experienced supervisors who are ready to deepen their knowledge, strengthen their leadership capacity, and confidently apply advanced supervision models in real-world settings.

Through a dynamic combination of live, facilitator-led online sessions, self-paced eLearning, and interactive coaching circles, participants will explore the theory, models, and ethical foundations of supervision.

Final delivery for 2025

Advanced Supervision Program
Commencing 2 September, 2025

[More information](#)

Advocacy update

Social work is now formally recognised by Australia's largest private health insurer, Medibank. National registration is gaining traction. We have secured influence in mental health workforce planning, family law reform, and disability services. Our voice is shaping how systems respond to trauma, inclusion, equity and care. These outcomes are creating real change – and show the impact of a strong, united profession.

KEY ADVOCACY HIGHLIGHTS

- **National Registration of Social Workers** – We hosted a national webinar, *National Registration of Social Workers: Pushing for Change*, attracting over 950 registrations. The momentum for change is growing.
- **Recognition by Medibank**
Australia's largest private health insurer, Medibank, now recognises Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs) as eligible mental health service providers.
- **Mental Health Workforce Strategy**
The AASW successfully secured a seat on the National Mental Health Workforce Sector Advisory Group, which oversees implementation of the 2022-2032 strategy.
- **Work and Development Orders (NSW)** – We worked with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice to include social workers in the Work and Development Order scheme, allowing eligible people to reduce fines through unpaid work, courses, counselling or treatment programs.
- **National Action Plan to End Child Sexual Abuse** – The AASW was consulted as part of the evaluation of this important national plan.
- **Family Law Reform** – We provided advice to the Federal Attorney-General's Department on proposed regulations for Family Report Writers, advocating for mandatory social work qualifications in this area.
- **Foundational Psychosocial Supports**
We contributed to a draft

position paper by Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA), highlighting the social work perspective and its strengths-based, person-in-environment approach.

- **Victoria's Victims of Crime Financial Assistance Scheme** – Advocated for improved payment processes for service providers and were invited to join the Advisory Group to support further reform.

SOCIAL WORK AND THE NDIS

- Joined the Now or Never campaign, aligning with allied health professions to call for sustainable NDIS reforms and fair pricing to protect access to quality, person-centred supports
- Advocated against recent NDIS changes, raising serious concerns about new funding period restrictions and informal 'check-in' procedures that undermine participant choice, control, and service stability
- Targeted letters to NDIS providers requesting advocacy meetings, with member involvement encouraged
- Member-contributed case studies for inclusion in advocacy materials
- A literature review on the effectiveness of social work supports in disability and NDIS
- A position paper on 'navigator' roles recommended in the NDIS Review, arguing these align with social workers' expertise.

RECENT SUBMISSIONS

- **Australian Institute of Family Studies – Kinship and Foster Care Review**
Advocated for carer payments, aligning with Australia's obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- **JobSeeker Advocacy** – Co-signed the community sector's letter calling for JobSeeker to be raised to a survival level.
- **Tasmanian Health Care Complaints Commission** – Called for a stronger compliance regime in healthcare regulation.

- **Queensland Youth Justice Reform**
Opposed the proposal to sentence children to mandatory incarceration in adult prisons.
- **National Mental Health Curriculum Framework** – Highlighted the unique contributions of social workers in understanding and supporting mental health, distinguishing our profession from other allied health disciplines.

ADDITIONAL ADVOCACY EFFORTS

- **Victims of Crime (Vic)** – Continued advocacy through the provider advisory group on reforming payment processes.
- **icare Lifetime Care and Support Scheme (NSW)** – Advocated for social workers' value and scope of practice in service delivery.
- **Victorian Public Mental Health Workforce Enterprise Bargaining Agreement** – Engaged with the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) to push for wage equity, appropriate staffing levels, and supervision for social workers.
- **Positive Behaviour Support (NDIS)** – Met with Flinders University to discuss minimum competencies and qualification thresholds for NDIS practitioners.
- **Compensable Schemes** – Submitted to Return to Work SA (RTWSA) and WorkCover Queensland, advocating for fee parity and trauma-informed extended consult time.
- **Mental Health Workforce Data** – Surveyed AMHSWs to contribute data to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).
- **Social Work in General Practice** – Provided feedback to Brisbane South Primary Health Network (PHN) on their evaluation framework.
- **Digital Health Integration** – Progressed work with Services Australia to streamline access for members to obtain a Healthcare Provider Identifier-Individual (HPI-I) number.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Gair is the current Editor of *Australian Social Work*, and Adjunct Associate Professor at James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland.

Highlights from the Australian Social Work Journal

Australian Social Work publishes bold, forward-thinking research tackling the real challenges faced by the profession today. As an AASW member, you have free access to this resource. Stay up to date with the latest articles, the four most recent articles are always featured on the aasw.asn.au homepage, along with a [link to the journal](#).

FEATURED ARTICLES

Adding Eye-Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) Therapy to a Workforce Wellbeing Model

Heather Morris, Sofia Grage-Moore, Clare Murphy, Jenny Dwyer, Nick Halfpenny, Robyn Miller et al.

Carers in out-of-home care settings often experience stress and trauma resulting from the behaviours of children and young people in their care. This mixed methods study explores the inclusion of EMDR therapy into a workforce wellbeing model, revealing a reduction in workplace incidents and improvements in staff wellbeing and retention. The findings support EMDR as a powerful tool to promote safety and emotional resilience in care environments.

Transitioning to Professional Practice: Experiences of International Master of Social Work Graduates from Australian Programs

Lana Battaglia, Catherine A. Flynn & Fiona McDermott

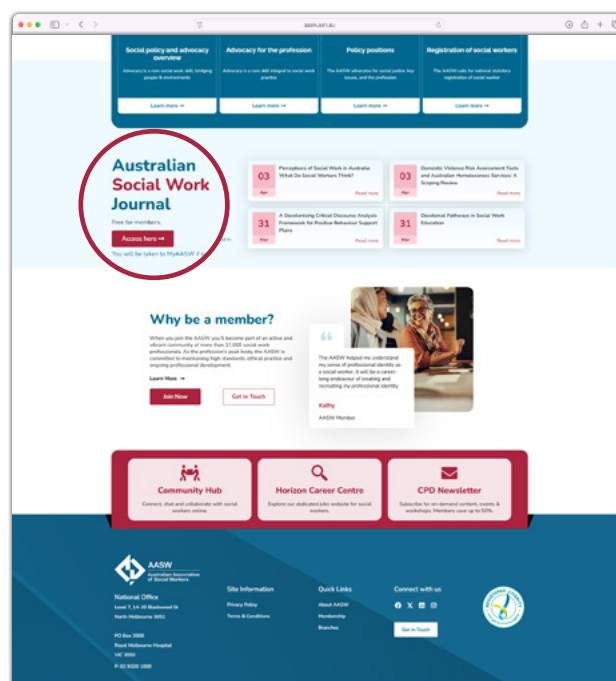
This study explores the transition to practice for international MSW graduates in Australia. Interviews revealed common challenges around fitting in and overcoming assumptions about cultural and language barriers. Over time, participants recognised their diversity as a strength. The findings advocate for more inclusive workplace practices and better preparation for culturally diverse graduates entering the field.

Artificial Intelligence in Social Work: An EPIC Model for Practice

Heather Boetto

With AI increasingly shaping workplace tools and systems, this article presents the EPIC model to guide social work engagement with artificial intelligence. The model emphasises: Ethics and justice, Policy development, Intersectoral collaboration, and Community empowerment. The paper calls for a proactive, values-based approach to ensure AI serves socially just and inclusive outcomes (read an extract on page 19 of this issue).

You can access Australian Social Work anytime via the journal button on the AASW homepage. If you're not logged in, you'll be redirected to MyAASW.



**Every AASW member
has a team of specialists
behind them – offering
guidance, protection
and support every
step of the way.**



Hall Payne Lawyers

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Australian Family Lawyers

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-  Branch Governance

Your AASW membership gives you access to a wide range of support services.

Log in to MyAASW and select 'My Benefits' from the left column to get started.

AASW National Excellence Awards, nominations open this August

Each year, the AASW National Excellence Awards celebrate the individuals across our profession who exemplify social work values through outstanding contributions to the community, research, advocacy, and education.

NATIONAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS



These prestigious awards honour AASW members making an enduring difference, whether they're on the ground in practice, shaping future social workers, influencing public discourse, or advancing culturally safe frameworks and systems.

We know our members are doing vital work at the heart of some of society's most pressing challenges. These awards are an opportunity to shine a light on those contributions and inspire excellence across the profession.

There are five award categories:

- Social Worker of the Year
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Social Worker of the Year
- Senior Researcher of the Year
- Early Career/Practitioner Researcher of the Year
- Social Work Student of the Year

NOMINATIONS OPEN IN AUGUST AND CLOSE IN SEPTEMBER.

Winners will be announced at our *Lyra Taylor Social Work Impact Summit* in November.

Whether you know someone who deserves recognition, or you'd like to nominate yourself, we encourage you to get involved.

Let's celebrate the best of our profession, those who lead with compassion, courage, and commitment.



Nomination details will be available on the AASW website in August.

Step up as a leader in social work and **become an Accredited Supervisor**



Effective supervision transforms practice and lives. With the **AASW Supervisor Credential**, you'll gain recognition for your skills, boost your confidence, and guide others with clarity and purpose.

- **Build ethical, impactful relationships**
- **Lead with empathy, insight, and reflection**
- **Elevate the competence of your team**
- **Shape the future of social work through practice, research, and education.**

Now more than ever, strong supervision is vital. Reports from the Royal Commission and State Ombudsman underscore the need for qualified, capable leaders in our field.

Don't wait, **apply for your Supervisor Credential today** and make a lasting impact.

FEATURE ARTICLES

Future proofing social work: tackling workforce challenges and upskilling for tomorrow

Social workers, leaders, and advocates gathered at Rydges Sydney Central for a panel event hosted by the AASW in May 2025. The discussion brought together prominent voices from government, health and community sectors to explore how the social work profession can navigate critical workforce challenges and ensure it remains resilient and equipped for the future. Carolyn Cousins, Director of Tuned In Consulting, chaired the discussion.

The panel featured distinguished voices in social work and community services, including Cindy Smith, CEO of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW), Michael Austin, CEO of CatholicCare Wollongong, Niko Milić, Social Work Manager at Services Australia, and Rachel Wolfe, Director of PARVAN Services within the Northern Sydney Local Health District (NSLHD). They engaged in a dynamic discussion exploring current challenges and future opportunities in the social services sector, emphasising collaboration, innovation, and effective leadership.

The discussion began with a sobering overview of the current workforce climate. Despite an increasing number of students entering social work programs, over 21,000 nationally, with more than 3,100 graduates annually, the sector continues to experience critical shortages. Cindy Smith emphasised this contradiction, noting that “social work has remained on the national skills shortage list for over a decade. We have more students than ever before, yet we still don’t have enough practitioners on the ground.” She added that upcoming Commonwealth-funded paid placement initiatives could ease some pressure on students, potentially boosting enrolment further.

Niko Milić shared insights from Services Australia, where he oversees a growing team of over 640 social workers. He observed that while people are

still entering the field with the same commitment to social justice and community wellbeing, they are now facing significantly more complex work environments. “Social workers are joining for the same reasons we always have, but the issues are more layered, and the organisational expectations are more visible,” he said. Milić also highlighted a stronger emphasis on workplace wellbeing, with greater accountability and expectations placed on employers to support psychological safety and work-life balance.

Rachel Wolfe spoke of the difficulties in violence, abuse and neglect services, pointing to the increasing scale of need without adequate matching of resources. “There’s been significant public and cultural attention to these issues, which has brought in funding, but not nearly enough,” she explained. “Social workers are passionate about doing meaningful work, but they’re constantly being asked to do more with less. That creates both personal and professional strain.”

Michael Austin echoed these concerns, particularly from the perspective of school-based social work. He described the growing complexity of client needs in educational settings - intersecting mental health, legal, and social factors - and noted a trend of social workers leaving the NGO sector for better-paid government positions. “We’re not losing them from the profession, but we are losing them to

different roles. That pay gap is real," he said.

In response to these challenges, the panellists explored how organisations can create environments that both attract and retain skilled social workers. Wolfe stressed the importance of valuing individuals holistically. "Flexible working arrangements, visible career development, and support for personalised wellbeing plans—these are the things that make social workers stay," she said. She described how her service has implemented tailored wellbeing agreements, with an emphasis on variety in caseloads to avoid exposure to continuous trauma work.

Milić agreed that culture is crucial, particularly the influence of immediate supervisors. Citing international research, he stated, "The number one factor in staff engagement is the line manager. Coaching-style leadership makes the difference." His team has invested heavily in developing leadership capabilities across the organisation and supporting networks such as communities of practice, including Indigenous and culturally marginalised groups, which offer peer support and advocacy.

Smith added that graduate preparation remains a key focus. Research by the AASW found that many employers felt graduates were underprepared for placements and professional practice, leading to higher attrition within the first few years. In response, the AASW has revised its education accreditation standards, focusing it on outcome-based standards building skills and knowledge. "Placement experience and confidence-building are vital to keeping social workers in the field," she said.

The conversation turned to future skills and the evolving role of the profession. Austin noted that baseline competencies now include areas once considered specialist, such as trauma-informed care, family violence response, and mental health. "What used to be advanced training is now essential for frontline work," he said. He also stressed the need for strong system navigation skills and understanding of marketised care models like the NDIS and aged care.

Referencing the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report, Smith noted that social work remains among the top 15 growth professions globally, largely due to ageing populations and increasing care complexity.

Artificial intelligence was another area of growing importance. Smith described how the AASW has encouraged staff to engage with AI tools creatively and critically. "It's a tool, and we need to be at the forefront of understanding its implications for practice," she said.

Panellists also spoke to the importance of leadership within the profession. Austin encouraged more social workers to step into executive roles to ensure ethical, values-based leadership within services. "We need more social workers running organisations," he urged. "It's not about abandoning our identity, it's about embedding it where decisions are made."

The event served as a call to action, for better preparation of graduates, more responsive workplaces, and greater leadership from within the profession. The conversation will continue, but the message was clear: social workers are ready to meet the future. Now the systems around them must do the same. The AASW is planning on running similar events around Australia during 2025.

Watch the session on [MyAASW here](#).



21,064

**social work students
enrolled nationally 2024**



59%

in Bachelor level programs and

41%

enrolled in Master level programs



3,100+

**social work graduates
annually**



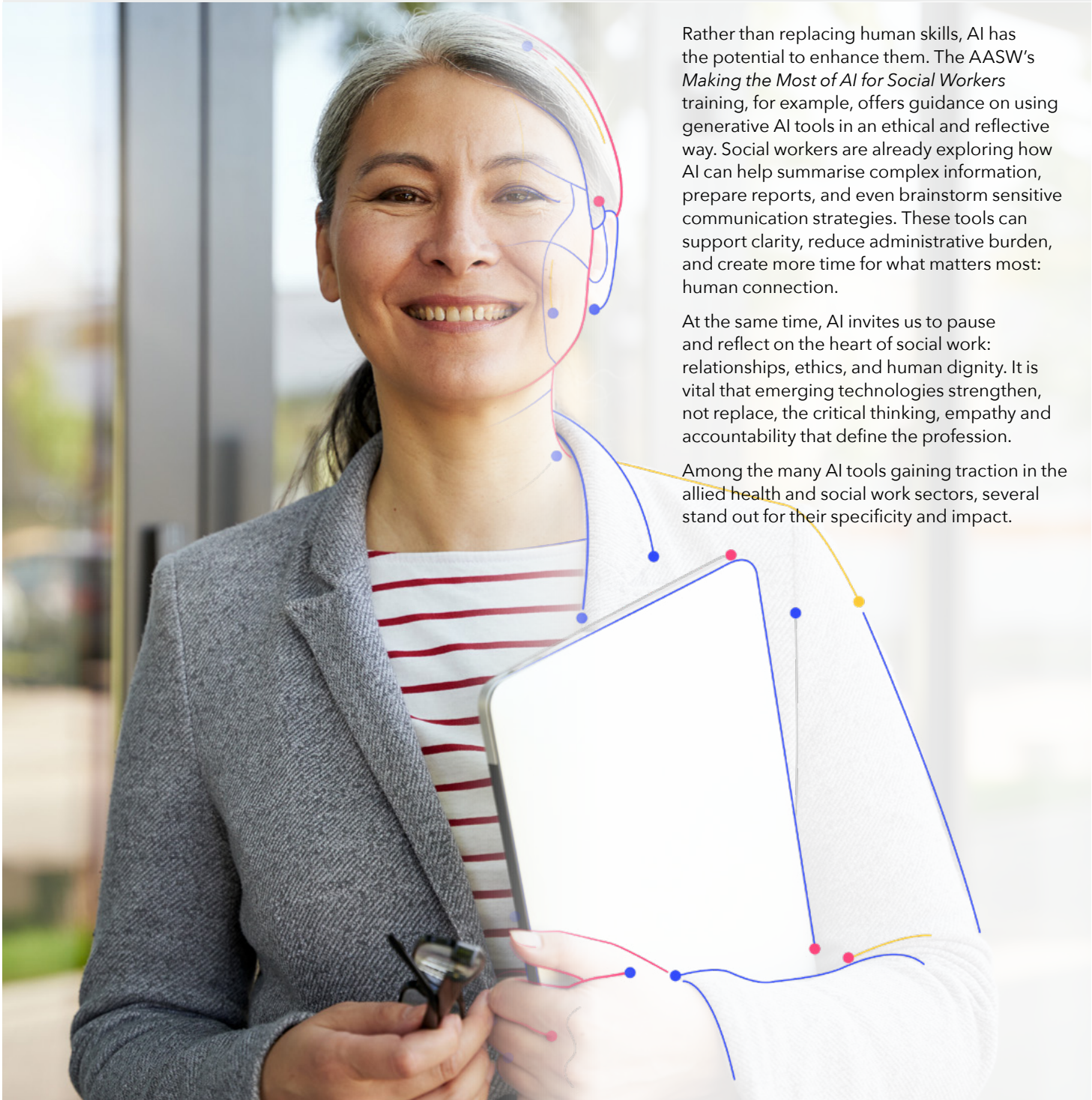
40

**accredited providers
offering 78 degrees**

AI and social work:

an emerging tool, ethical tensions, and what comes next

Artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping many professional fields and social work is no exception. From streamlining documentation to supporting communication and service planning, AI tools such as ChatGPT are beginning to show promise as practical aids in everyday practice.



Rather than replacing human skills, AI has the potential to enhance them. The AASW's *Making the Most of AI for Social Workers* training, for example, offers guidance on using generative AI tools in an ethical and reflective way. Social workers are already exploring how AI can help summarise complex information, prepare reports, and even brainstorm sensitive communication strategies. These tools can support clarity, reduce administrative burden, and create more time for what matters most: human connection.

At the same time, AI invites us to pause and reflect on the heart of social work: relationships, ethics, and human dignity. It is vital that emerging technologies strengthen, not replace, the critical thinking, empathy and accountability that define the profession.

Among the many AI tools gaining traction in the allied health and social work sectors, several stand out for their specificity and impact.

Social workers are increasingly experimenting with generative AI tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini to assist with tasks such as drafting reports, summarising complex information, and brainstorming approaches for sensitive client communication. This uptake reflects a broader trend in the sector towards integrating AI-powered technologies.

As these tools become more common, their design and use must be guided by strong ethical principles, including privacy, fairness, and cultural safety, and shaped by trauma-informed approaches that prioritise dignity, trust, and the wellbeing of clients.

Many organisations are recognising the governance issues around social work and AI. The Data for Good project, a three-year research partnership between CSI Flinders and Uniting Communities, is examining how AI and automated decision-making are shaping Australia's social services sector. The project has raised concerns about Australia's proposed AI risk framework, warning that vague definitions and limited avenues for redress could erode public trust.

As Reamer (2023) notes, over-reliance on AI can unintentionally deskilling practitioners or encourage a checklist approach. Social workers must ensure that technology simplifies tasks, not people's lives. Used well, AI can support professional judgment, deepen reflective practice, and even prompt new insights.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: PRIVACY, BIAS, AND EQUITY

As with any innovation, AI introduces important ethical questions. How do we protect client confidentiality in data-driven systems? How do we challenge bias embedded in algorithms? And how do we ensure access to these tools is fair and equitable?

Social workers routinely handle sensitive information such as trauma histories, mental health records, and legal matters. The profession's ethical responsibilities around privacy are clear. The *AASW Code of Ethics (2020)* emphasises the need for informed consent, confidentiality, and strong data protections. Social workers

must ensure any tools used meet the highest standards of security and professional integrity. Uploading client data to external AI platforms that are not purpose-built for health or human services can pose risks and must be approached with caution.

Bias is another challenge. AI systems are trained on large datasets that may reflect structural inequalities. In other sectors, this has resulted in discrimination against people with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. In social work, biased outputs could affect assessments, referrals or service access. Social workers must stay alert to these risks, uphold their commitment to human rights, and advocate for ethical, transparent systems.

Importantly, AI must not be seen as an expert or authority. These tools can generate inaccurate or misleading information, sometimes with confidence. Social workers remain accountable for all professional decisions and must verify outputs, never using AI for diagnosis or direction of treatment. The best use of AI is as a prompt for reflection, not a substitute for professional reasoning.

Equity of access also matters. Not all services have the same digital infrastructure. Rural and remote agencies, or those with limited resources, may be left behind in the AI transition. Addressing this is part of our collective commitment to social justice. The sector must work to ensure inclusive design, access to training, and support for workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

WHAT COMES NEXT?

AI offers real opportunities to improve practice but only if it is used with care, curiosity, and integrity. Social workers are well-placed to lead the conversation about how to integrate these tools in ways that honour ethical values and centre the voices of clients and communities.

With the right approach, AI can prompt critical thinking, foster innovation, and support social workers in delivering ethical, person-centred practice.

The future of AI in social work is not just about technology. It is about people. And how we choose to use new tools to uphold and advance the values that define the profession.

FURTHER READING:

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AI tools and social work: a quick guide

Generative AI Tools like ChatGPT, Claude, and Google Gemini offer useful support for social workers, from drafting documents to simplifying complex information. When used ethically and thoughtfully, they can boost efficiency and free up more time for client care.

Generative AI refers to systems that can create human-like text, images, or ideas based on the data they've been trained on. Unlike traditional software, they generate new content, helping with writing, problem-solving, and conversation.

This article explores how to use these tools effectively, guided by AASW's standards and privacy principles.

CHATGPT

Good for idea generation, fun, general tasks and answers.

Developed by OpenAI, ChatGPT is perhaps the most well-known AI assistant. It offers a conversational interface where you can ask questions, request content creation, or seek guidance on various topics. ChatGPT comes in free and paid versions (ChatGPT Plus), with the paid version offering more advanced capabilities, greater responsiveness, and features like image generation.

CLAUDE

Good for copywriting, structure and clarity.

Created by Anthropic, Claude is designed with a focus on helpfulness, harmlessness, and honesty. Claude excels at thoughtful conversation, complex reasoning tasks, and creative collaboration.

GOOGLE GEMINI

Good for use with Google products: drawing on Google Search, YouTube, GoogleDocs, etc.

Google's Gemini (formerly Bard) integrates with Google's search capabilities and can provide up-to-date information on recent events. Gemini is particularly strong at integrating with other Google tools and services.

HOW CAN SOCIAL WORKERS USE AI TOOLS?

Based on the AASW guidelines and ethical considerations, here are productive ways social workers can incorporate AI:

1. **Content creation**
Draft emails, newsletters, and educational materials for clients or colleagues.
2. **Research assistance**
Gather information on

resources, interventions, or community services.

3. **Administrative support**
Generate documentation templates or help organise notes.
4. **Professional development**
Create personalised learning materials or practice scenarios.
5. **Simplifying complex information**
Summarise key points of policy documents or break down research documents into easy-to-read overviews.
6. **Time management**
Draft schedules or planning documents for client sessions or team meetings.
7. **Community engagement**
Draft outreach materials or event announcements.





ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PRIVACY CONCERNS

While AI offers many benefits, it's crucial to maintain ethical standards:

What to avoid:

1. **Never input identifiable client information**
AI systems store and learn from the data you provide.
2. **Don't rely on AI for clinical decisions**
AI should never replace professional judgement in assessment or treatment planning.
3. **Avoid using AI for diagnostic purposes**
These tools are not clinically validated for mental health diagnosis.
4. **Don't present AI-generated content as expert analysis**
Always review and verify information.
5. **Never use AI to replace human connection**
The therapeutic relationship remains central to social work practice.

Best practices:

1. **Always verify information**
AI can produce "hallucinations" (instances where an AI generates false or misleading information that appears plausible but is not based on real data) which leads to inaccurate information.
2. **Use anonymous examples**
If seeking advice, use fictional scenarios or thoroughly anonymised information.
3. **Maintain boundaries**
Use AI as a tool, not a replacement for professional skills
4. **Stay informed**
AI capabilities and limitations change rapidly; ongoing education is essential
5. **Disclose**
Mention where AI is used - this supports ethical practice

With thoughtful implementation, these tools can help us work more efficiently, allowing more time for what matters most, supporting our clients.

Always refer to current AASW guidelines, your organisation's policies, and relevant privacy laws when incorporating new technologies into your practice.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/event/making-the-most-of-ai-for-social-workers-may-2025>

Making the most of AI for social workers: course review

DR MATT LOADS

I recently attended the AASW's *Making the Most of AI for Social Workers* training presented by Simon Hillier, and I genuinely got a lot out of it, both professionally and creatively. As someone working in communications alongside social workers, I found the ideas, discussions, and hands-on activities incredibly relevant and energising.

What stood out most was how practical and accessible the content was. It wasn't just a tech overview, it was a deeply thoughtful dive into how tools like ChatGPT can support the communication goals of social workers without compromising ethics or sensitivity. The use of case examples, discussion of ethical frameworks, and persuasive writing exercises were all grounded in the real-world challenges of our sector.

The group discussions were insightful, and I walked away with a fresh toolkit of ideas and AI prompting techniques that I've already started applying in my work.

Highly recommended for anyone in a role who wants to harness AI in a smart, socially responsible way.

As part of my follow-up from the Making the Most of AI for Social Workers course, I had the chance to speak directly with the trainer, Simon Hillier. I wanted to hear more about what motivated him to develop the program and how he sees AI fitting into the social work profession.



Here's what he had to say:

What inspired you to develop this course on AI for social workers?

I've been training public and private organisations in communications for over 20 years, including many health organisations. Since incorporating AI into my workshops, I've taken an extra careful approach because privacy, data security and AI recommendations come with great potential risk impact. Especially in the health sector.

There's no denying, I do get excited about AI and love introducing participants to these amazing tools. But I always do it in a way that keeps people, safety and ethics at the centre.

How do you see AI enhancing, not replacing, social work practice?

Social work is fundamentally about people, relationships and trust. That can't be automated. What AI can do is handle repetitive tasks that eat into precious time like drafting reports, summarising information or brainstorming. That frees professionals to invest more of their time, energy and expertise into the person-to-person side of their roles. Think of yourself as the conductor of your AI orchestra.

What are the biggest misconceptions social workers have about AI?

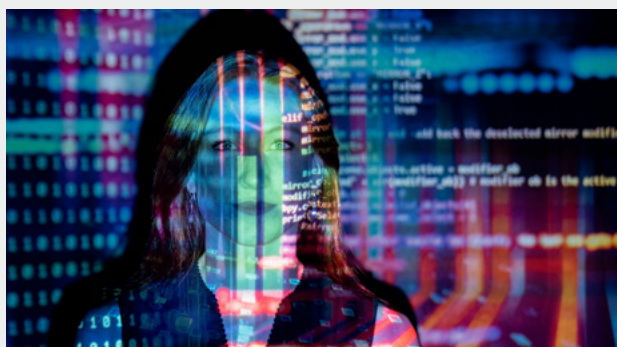
That AI is just a glorified writing tool. ChatGPT and Co. are incredibly versatile. ChatGPT alone can help analyse data, design sessions, market your business, organise your day and generate images and videos. It can even suggest what to eat for dinner based on a photo of the items in your fridge. There's a lot more to it than meets the eye.

The truth is, if you can use a keyboard and mouse, or voice-to-text tool, you can learn to use ChatGPT and other Large Language Models effectively. I've taught AI to more than 4,500 people over the past three years and 95% would laugh if called a techie.

Artificial intelligence in social work:

an EPIC model for practice

HEATHER BOETTO (EXCERPT)



ABSTRACT

As artificial intelligence (AI) permeates the workplace environments of social workers, there is a need to understand the risks and benefits posed to the mission and values of the profession. This article examines the influence of artificial intelligence on the profession, including opportunities to advance socially just outcomes and challenges that risk ethical practice. A comprehensive review of literature was conducted to examine existing research on the intersection of AI and social work. Drawing on insights from this review, an EPIC model for integrating artificial intelligence into the profession is presented, consisting of four components: (E) ethics and justice; (P) policy development and advocacy; (I) intersectoral collaboration; and (C) community engagement and empowerment. The author contends that augmenting the benefits of artificial intelligence in social work requires a proactive and ethical approach towards a more secure, safe, transparent, and socially just future.

The recent acceleration of artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping the roles and responsibilities of social workers, including the relationships formed between service users and practitioners. AI provides opportunities to address social problems and advance socially just outcomes. For example, AI can enable accessibility

and foster inclusivity for people with disabilities (Kumar et al., 2023), enhance the efficiency of humanitarian aid efforts (Taouktsis & Zikopoulos, 2024), and improve diagnostics and treatment in health (Alowais et al., 2023). However, the most recent Global

Risks Report (World Economic Forum, WEF, 2024) identified AI-generated misinformation and disinformation as the number one risk factor to global stability over the next two years, involving the persistent spread of false, manipulated, and fabricated information through online media networks.

Further, the United Nations (UN, 2024) adopted a landmark resolution to promote the development of secure and trustworthy AI systems, referring to the need to address associated racial discrimination, bias, and human rights issues. This evidence highlights the paradoxical and complex nature of AI, requiring an articulated and collective global social work approach.

DEFINING AI

The term AI refers to computer technologies that have the capacity to mimic or simulate human intelligence (Kalota, 2024; Sheikh et al., 2023). Often referred to in popular culture as “smart” or “intelligent”, AI encompasses a wide scope of technologies that can solve complex problems using mathematical logic to learn, reason and self-correct (Dung Le et al., 2023). A subcategory of AI is machine learning applications. According to Janiesch et al. (2021), there are three foundations of machine learning architecture involving machine learning algorithms; artificial neural networks; and deep neural networks. While these terms often

are used interchangeably, machine learning algorithms and artificial neural networks adopt “shallow” machine learning processes involving relatively simple models that consist of a small number of processing stages (Janiesch et al., 2021, p. 687). Typically, they have a limited capacity to learn complex patterns (e.g., a decision tree used to classify medical symptoms). Deep neural networks adopt “deep” machine learning processes, which consist of a multilayered neural network system that is not traceable or interpretable by humans (Janiesch et al., 2021, p. 688), and which typically involve more advanced tasks (e.g., convolutional neural network used for image recognition). The type of deep learning machines garnering much public debate is generative AI, which has the capacity to autonomously augment, synthesise, and innovate new data inspired from an original dataset (Gignac & Szodorai, 2024; Kalota, 2024). A significant issue with deep learning machines, especially generative AI, is that their operations are often likened to a “black box”, meaning their decision-making processes are opaque, even to the developers who create them (Wadden, 2021). This rise of generative AI represents an acceleration in technological advancement and presents complex challenges regarding the ethical use of AI.

You can access it anytime via the [journal button on the AASW homepage](#). If you're not logged in, you'll be redirected to MyAASW.

References available through Australian Social Work via MyAASW.

Empowering lives:

social prescribing as a path to wellbeing and recovery

JEEVAN BHUSAL

Jeevan Bhusal is a full-time social worker currently employed at Grampians Health Ballarat as a Psych Social Worker. He completed his MSW (Q) from the Australian College of Applied Psychology (ACAP), Sydney Campus in 2021.

INTRODUCTION

Social prescribing (SP) is a process of connecting or reconnecting people with local communities or groups. As a method, it enables welfare professionals—including social workers, clinicians, and other primary care workers—to link patients to community support services, beyond pharmaceuticals, to address their psychosocial, economic, emotional, and practical needs. Often described as community referral or non-medical prescribing, SP aims to address the social and psychological aspects of treatment alongside biomedical concerns within existing treatment plans. It expands the tools available to practitioners, allowing them to provide non-medical referral options that can serve as alternatives to medication, thereby fostering independence, social connection, and resilience, and easing pressure on mainstream mental health services.

Social prescribing involves a trusted referrer connecting a person with a link worker, who helps the individual create a personalised plan, identifying opportunities and pathways for enrichment to improve their quality of life within local communities. The foundation of SP lies in a person-centred approach to care, which considers the needs and social networks of each individual to determine the most suitable care options. This also enables social workers to implement culturally responsive care, as SP acts as a bridge

to connect individuals to associations and resources of their choosing. This holistic approach can address underlying or causal issues, ultimately leading to improved long-term mental health recovery.

Social prescribing is gaining global attention, as evidence supports its effectiveness in reducing loneliness and social isolation, which encourages socially disconnected individuals to engage in activities that align with their cultural and physical comfort levels (Reinhardt et al., 2021). Another study noted that one in three adults in Australia experiences loneliness (Baker, 2012), a figure likely exacerbated by COVID-19 and its associated physical distancing policies. This surge in loneliness has drawn attention to it as a public health concern (Pai and Vella, 2021), due to its correlation with depression, social anxiety, psychosis, substance use disorders, and other chronic diseases (Dingle et al., 2024). Loneliness is also linked with poor quality of life, feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, and frequent use of mainstream health services and Emergency Departments (ED), placing preventable strain on healthcare systems and the economy. Social isolation also contributes to longer inpatient stays and repeated ED visits; hence, social prescribing offers a unique solution to loneliness.

According to Dingle and Sharman (2022), general practice- and community-based SP models are the most employed by health

professionals. The most widely practiced SP model has three steps: the individual is referred to a social prescribing clinic by a caregiver or welfare professional, including general practitioners; a link worker then performs a holistic assessment to understand the person's needs, interests, preferences, and barriers to social connection; and finally, the link worker supports the individual in engaging in preferred social activities available within their community. Although SP is widely implemented and researched in countries like the UK and Canada, Australia has fewer SP programs but greater resources through various public, private, and community-funded services, such as Workplace Injury Insurance and Community Hubs and Centres. In these settings, social workers, psychologists, counsellors, and registered nurses, who possess extensive knowledge of local societies, play a critical role in guiding individuals to engage in social activities.

APPROPRIATENESS OF SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

As a mental health social worker based in a regional town, I believe we are notably under-resourced and face a severe lack of mainstream services in regional communities across Australia. Social prescribing (SP) can play a vital role in reducing the volume of referrals we receive, acting as a preventative mechanism. It also provides an excellent opportunity to collaborate



closely with local resources, promoting social sustainability—a process in which communities thrive and coexist in a healthy, fair, and equitable way. Based on my professional experience, SP is essential for individuals facing mental health challenges who often struggle to integrate into their communities due to stigma, isolation, and various disadvantages. These individuals may experience a shorter life expectancy than the general population due to preventable physical conditions and often face adverse life experiences, including low levels of engagement, leading to institutionalisation and overmedication. Additionally, SP can help individuals build a sense of identity beyond their condition, connecting them with peers and community activities and empowering them to lead full, meaningful lives.

While SP can benefit everyone, I believe it is particularly suited to individuals with mental illnesses currently linked to mainstream mental health services. First, their recovery requires a stronger community connection through tailored and supported engagement to help them feel socially included. Second, combining psychosocial interventions with biomedical approaches is the most effective strategy for mental health treatment. Finally, this population is often prone to frequent ED presentations, extended inpatient stays, health disparities,

low quality of life, and a greater likelihood of self-harm due to feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and a lack of purpose, often exacerbated by social alienation.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF SP

Early intervention is widely regarded as the most effective approach, underscoring the importance of preventative measures. The right level of support within an early intervention framework is essential to facilitate engagement, and social prescribing provides accessible entry points to care. Social prescribing emphasises social infrastructure as a marker of well-being, supporting individuals within existing socio-cultural systems while prioritising local resources, practices, and knowledge. It also adapts to the individual's evolving needs throughout their recovery journey. For example, men in regional and remote areas are less likely to seek mental health support due to stigma; social prescribing can act as a catalyst to ensure everyone in the community feels supported and connected.

Additionally, empirical evidence shows that loneliness and mental distress occur across the lifespan, meaning diverse programs are necessary for different age groups. While many community-based services already exist, social prescribing can aid in developing an integrated service

system that simplifies navigation. It advocates for consumer- and carer-focused systems, emphasising purpose, contribution, and a sense of belonging within local communities. Finally, social prescribing also addresses physical health needs, which are often overlooked or not managed adequately or early enough.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, social prescribing offers a transformative opportunity to bridge the gap between pharmaceuticals and community-based mental health care by addressing socio-cultural, emotional, and practical needs. As global recognition of loneliness as a public health concern grows, social prescribing provides a sustainable alternative for accelerating recovery, reducing pressure on mainstream mental health services, and promoting community resilience. Since the principles of social prescribing align closely with the values of the social work profession, it should be employed as a tool by every social worker to collectively fulfill their altruistic purpose of fostering social well-being.

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A journey towards graduation: reflections of a social work student

KRIPA BHATTA - MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK (MSW) STUDENT

As I approach the end of my two rewarding years in the Master of Social Work program, I feel compelled to reflect on the transformative journey that has brought me to this point.

From the initial motivation that inspired me to pursue social work to the invaluable lessons gained through coursework and placements, this journey has been enriching and challenging. Along the way, I have experienced what feels like a “thoughts into words” moment, a period of self-reflection and growth, where ideas, emotions, and experiences have sharpened my understanding and reshaped my professional identity.

In this article, I aim to reflect on my experiences, the challenges encountered, and the aspirations I hold as I transition from student to professional.



INSPIRATION AND BEGINNINGS

My passion for social work was shaped early in life by the kindness and unwavering commitment of the people around me. Growing up, I was fascinated by the way communities supported one another, and I often wondered how I could contribute in a meaningful way. I was drawn to the stories of resilience and strength in those around me, but I also questioned “how could I truly make a difference?” As I grew older, my curiosity about society and human relationships deepened. I wanted to understand the complexities of social issues, not just from observation but with real knowledge and skill. This curiosity led me to social work, a field where compassion meets action. Once I stepped into this world, I realised the profound impact social workers have in empowering individuals, families, and entire communities. My studies further reinforced this realisation, as theoretical knowledge began to merge with real-world experiences, bringing a deeper sense of purpose to my journey.

THE LEARNING CURVE

Field placements have been one of the most transformative aspects of the journey in social work. These experiences have provided an invaluable, firsthand understanding of the multifaceted nature of social work practice, which cannot be fully captured in the classroom. Field placements serve as the bridge between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, offering the chance to put what has been learned into action. The ability to observe and engage with clients in

a real-world setting is essential to understanding the complexities of human behaviour, diverse needs, and the various systems that impact individuals and communities. While the journey through placement can sometimes feel overwhelming, especially when faced with challenging cases or new situations, it should be viewed as a crucial learning phase. The initial uncertainties and difficulties are opportunities for growth and professional development. The exposure to complex scenarios pushes boundaries and fosters a deeper understanding of social work practice. It provides a space to refine skills, assess one’s own abilities, and recognise areas for further growth. These challenges are what contribute to the shaping of a well-rounded and effective social worker.

The journey has certainly not been without its challenges. Balancing the demands of academic responsibilities with the practical experience gained through placement and the pressures of part-time work at times felt overwhelming. The constant juggling of these various roles required a high level of time management, discipline, and prioritisation. There were moments

when it felt like there simply weren't enough hours in the day to fully dedicate oneself to each aspect. However, these challenges also served as valuable learning experiences, teaching the importance of setting boundaries, seeking support when necessary, and staying focused on long-term goals.

As an international student, adapting to different cultural and ethical frameworks in social work practice presented additional challenges. Social work in my home country follows different norms and expectations than in Australia, requiring continuous learning and adjustment. This involved understanding local cultural dynamics, respecting cultural norms, and integrating this knowledge into practice. Actively seeking guidance from lecturers and supervisors, engaging with peers, and being open to feedback have all played a crucial role in my development as a culturally competent practitioner.

Maintaining self-care and emotional resilience became crucial in managing the emotional demands of social work. Overall, these experiences have highlighted that professional growth in social work is about more than acquiring skills and knowledge, it's about adapting, reflecting, and responding thoughtfully to the complexities of practice. Each challenge, whether cultural, ethical, or emotional, contributed to a deeper understanding of both social work and personal development.

To those embarking on this journey, I offer the following insights: Embrace supervision as a valuable tool for growth and development, using it as a space to reflect, seek guidance, and refine your practice. Social work can be emotionally demanding, so developing resilience and prioritising self-care is essential to maintaining your well-being while supporting others. Additionally, engage in continuous learning, while theories and

frameworks are foundational, it is the practical experience that truly shapes your professional identity. Graduating with a degree in social work is just the beginning of a dynamic, ever-evolving career. The field requires ongoing self-reflection, adaptation, and commitment. As I take the next steps in my career, I do so with gratitude for the lessons I have learned and a deep sense of responsibility to uphold the core values of the profession.

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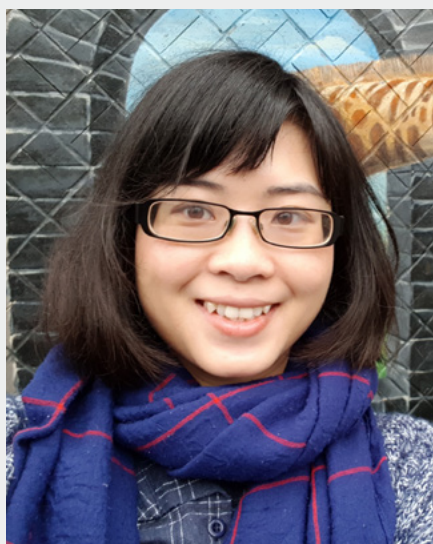
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Change through exchange:

a personal experience with CIF exchange program

Shijun Huang is a social worker with over 14 years of experience in aged care, in various roles in both community and hospital settings. She's currently working in adult protection service under the SA state government.



Shijun reflects on her personal experience of participating in the International Professional Exchange Program (IPEP) in Austria, organised and facilitated by the Council of International Fellowship (CIF).

As a social worker, I've always been curious about how my international colleagues navigate diverse political, welfare, and economic systems. I believe cross-cultural learning benefits social work practice globally. With that expectation, I applied for the International Professional Exchange Program (IPEP) hosted by Council of International Fellowship (CIF) Austria branch. Luckily, I was selected as one of six participants in the 2024 program.

This year's 19-day program began with five days in Schoderleh, a small village

at the east end of the Alps. Participants from Australia, Turkey, Italy, Finland, France, and Ghana got to know each other through discussion of social work practices, shared information on social policies and challenges, and even visited a local farm. The remaining program was divided into a general program for all participants and individualised sessions based on interests.

I stayed at Vienna for the entire program. The program was intense. But it was an enriching and eye-opening experience. Following the program, I had the chance to wander through Vienna's streets. The amazing architectures and urban design connecting the past and present through a dialogue between old and new, emphasising both cultural preservation and openness to modernity. Once you know about Vienna, you will discover it's more than just a city - it's a symphony of human resilience, and a living canvas for social transformation and development. It's a perfect place to explore how society is shaping social work. For those who are interested in psychoanalysis, the Sigmund Freud Museum provides a unique experience to reflect on Freud's legacy and how psychoanalytic principles can inform our social work practice.

When housing affordability has been a widely discussed concern in Australia and many other countries, I surprisingly

found out Vienna has a robust social housing system that ensures citizens have access to affordable housing. As part of the city tour, we visited Carl Marx Hof in the 19 District – an example of the Austrian government's commitment for social housing. Carl Marx Hof is a huge public housing project completed in 1930 under the lead of socialist authorities "Red Vienna". With over 1,250 apartments, clinics, playgrounds, and lush greenery, it's a city within a city. The Viennese I spoke to beamed with pride when they talked about their social housing system. City of Vienna has been the biggest landlord in Europe. A quarter of the people who live in Vienna are social tenants. They follow a philosophy when design and building the social housing system that social housing is not just for the poor. As Australia grapples with a rental crisis, Vienna's model offers hope: affordable living, contained rents, and a lesson worth sharing.

During my visit to House Jaro, this remarkable program caught my attention. This unique program is funded jointly by the City of Vienna and Church Caritas. House Jaro is a temporary emergency accommodation service for homeless European citizens without insurance and who have medical conditions. Most residents are older individuals. Notably, they employ a scholar as their PR person to handle communication and promotion. This program is being considered as part



of the hospital avoidance program as it has a workforce with social worker, nurse, doctor and psychiatrist. Encouragingly, it also invites university students, like those from Sigmund Freud Privat Universität to join as interns. During the introduction of this program, the manager proudly stated that one of their missions is to educate future generations and reduce misunderstandings and stigma surrounding homelessness.

The CIF Austrian program also has a strong connection with the university. A group of students from the University of Applied Sciences were also involved in the program. This group of students were mostly but not limited to social work students. Students from other majors also participated. Together, they attended visits and shared insights through PowerPoint presentations on social work practices in each participant's country. This cultural exchange wasn't just enriching for participants—it ignited reflection and broadened horizons for Austrian future social workers.

This was an excellent exchange experience that surpassed my expectations. There were other

unforgettable moments in this program, such as speaking to a Parliament member and knowing that Austrian social workers have a voice in the Parliament, the "Change through Exchange" presentation delivered by all the participants, cultural exchange party night and conversation in depth with my host family, etc.

It was a privilege to talk to my social work colleagues from different countries, on the platform built by CIF network to achieve understanding, eliminate prejudice, gain inspiration, reflection, and develop new perspectives to my own country and area that I have been working in.



A guide to terminology when working with First Nations peoples of Australia

AJ WILLIAMS-TCHEN

Reconciliation is about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal peoples, Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider non-Indigenous Australian community. Language and terminology are important constructs when being an ally and ensuring that respectful and inclusive ways of communication are always maintained. Terminology changes over time, and, where possible, it is always best practice to consult with the local traditional custodians, community Elders, and respected First Nations consultants for the most appropriate terms within the community that you work with, or read up on the latest state-based First Nations community and state government terminology guidelines.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



AJ Williams-Tchen (Wiradjuri/Wotjobulak) is an award-winning social worker, nurse and youth worker. He graduated from social work studies in 1997, and currently is Director of Girraway Ganyi Consultancy. AJ has over 35 years' experience in health and community services, working with Aboriginal communities across the country. He was awarded the AASW 2021 Aboriginal Social Worker of the Year, and the Allied Health Awards 2023 Social Worker of the Year. In 2024 he was a nominee for Australian of the Year for Victoria.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

1) Use of capital letters

'Aboriginal', 'Torres Strait Islander', 'First Nations', 'Indigenous' must always be capitalised. They are proper nouns, that serve as the name of a specific place, person or thing. Capitalisation should also occur for other terms such as 'Native Title', 'Traditional Custodians' and 'Culture'. When referencing Elders, capitalise the 'E' as it is a specific title. 'Welcome to Country' and 'Acknowledgement of Country' are cultural practices - these also need to be capitalised. Reconciliation does not need to be capitalised, unless you are referring to a Reconciliation Action Plan or National Reconciliation Week.

2) Do not abbreviate

As a culture, we are not an abbreviation. ATSI is not an acceptable term to use. Many people ask what it stands for; and in summary, it stands for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Yet, I am not an Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander person. There is no Torres Strait Islander blood in me. Yes, I am Aboriginal - so ATSI does not define me. Really, this

abbreviation is nothing more than sheer laziness. ATSI person, ATSI people, ATSI communities. Write it out in full. There are Aboriginal people and there are Torres Strait Islander people. This takes us to the next point.

3) Be conscious of diversity

Avoid where possible saying or writing "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people", or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community'. Is not acceptable as they imply homogeneity of a group. There are many Aboriginal communities across Australia, as there are also numerous Torres Strait Islander communities. Where possible, use the term 'Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples' or 'Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities', as this highlights the diversity that exists between and within groups.

Australia is made up of many language groups. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) explains that there are more than 250 language groups, including 800 dialects. Each language is specific to a particular place and

people. Where possible, and talking about a specific area in Australia, it is important to list that area by the language group that governs that specific land. For example, my mob comes from Dubbo, and I identify as being 'Wiradjuri'. Learning, identifying and using local language groups shows your understanding of diversity.

compliant in the process of losing or misplacing of such things. Truth-telling here should be prominent. Was culture, community and family lost or was it 'stolen' or 'taken away' from First Nations people. For some Aboriginal, and some Torres Strait Islander people who have been disconnected from culture, community and family through whatever

were used to classify Aboriginal people based on skin colour and Aboriginal percentage. It is important to stay away from these definitions.

7) A few other things to remember

- Understand language words and what they mean:
'Mob' is a term identifying a group associated with a particular place or Country.
- 'Sorry Business' the period of mourning after a death and the celebrations / ceremonies undertaken within that time.
- 'Deadly' means 'awesome', 'cool', 'everything is going ok'.
- 'Men's business' / 'Women's business': not a discriminatory or sexist separation and is not to the detriment of either party. Instead, it focuses on particular roles, ceremonies and Lore that is specific and sacred to men and women individually.
- 'Terra nullius' a concept meaning 'a territory belonging to no-one'. This concept was used to justify the invasion and colonisation of Australia
- 'Gammon'. Joking, have fun with
- 'Shame' more than mere embarrassment
- 'Old People' our Ancestors.



4) Be careful of possessive language

Avoid using terms like 'our' such as 'our Aboriginal community', or 'our First Nations clients', as this implies some sort of ownership over the group. Such references should be written or voiced as 'the Aboriginal families that we work with' or 'the First Nations communities that we work with'. 'Australia's First People' could also risk being viewed as paternalistic, so using the term 'First Peoples of Australia' would be a better fit.

5) Lose the term 'Loss of' or 'Lost': make it strength-based

When referring to the effects of colonisation, people write phrases such as 'As a result of colonisation, First Nations people lost language', or 'As a result of colonisation, Indigenous people lost the sense of community and culture'. The word 'Lost' makes it sound as if Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people were careless and

Government legislation was in place, may not have had them to start off with. So 'loss' for them would mean that they would have had to have these things to start with.

6) Be aware of terms to avoid

- Aborigine
- ATSI (as mentioned above)
- Native
- Mixed blood
- Half-caste
- Quarter-caste
- Full-blood
- Part- Aboriginal.

These were words that were used in previous legislation, written with the sole purpose of out-breeding Aboriginal people. Prior to the 1967 referendum, laws in relation to the protection of First Nations people were the responsibility of states and territories. These words

I hope that this is a good start to becoming more aware of appropriate terminology.

Survey results highlights

SURVEY



Following the 2024 member survey, the AASW developed its Strategic Plan 2024-2027, setting three strategic priorities:

1. Champion the social work profession
2. Drive professional growth
3. Create a better future.

To enable us to further set operational priorities, we sought feedback via a deeper-dive survey in Feb-March 2025, open to all social workers, regardless of membership of the AASW. By diving into core areas such as advocacy, professional recognition, and engagement, the results have provided us with actionable insights to guide the AASW's decision-making.

Many thanks to everyone who took the time to give their feedback – 3,034 social workers took the time to complete the survey! The findings serve as a practical tool to help the AASW strengthen its capacity to effectively represent and support social workers across Australia, ensuring the profession continues to thrive and evolve in response to ongoing and emerging challenges.

The results also give confidence that the findings are generalisable to the wider membership, and give insight to what really matters to our members.

KEY PRIORITIES

We asked what social workers want the AASW to focus on, and these are the top themes that came through:

1. **Upholding Professional Standards (Essential Priority)**
Members expect the AASW to safeguard the profession's integrity, ensuring that qualifications, ethics, and practice standards remain strong.
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.
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 AASW should continue to advocate on behalf of social workers, ensuring their voices are heard in policy decisions.

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 and also encompasses 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 the AASW to continue its work in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in social work.

In addition to the multiple-choice questions, we had a section where you could tell us anything. We read all of the feedback.

These are the areas that you told us were important to **keep doing**:

- Providing strong support to social workers - including representation and advice



- Advocacy work - engaging in systemic change and representing the profession
- Continuing the varied CPD offerings
- Offering quality resources and practical tools
- Standing by the profession's values: upholding standards and the social work Code of Ethics.

THE AREAS THAT YOU TOLD US TO DO MORE OF:

- Improve access: geographic, digital, and procedural access to services and opportunities
- Focus on communication: sharing clear, timely, member-focused communication about what AASW is doing
- Inclusion and diversity particularly around leadership visibility and equitable support
- Public campaigns: do more public-facing campaigning that lift the profession's visibility and influence
- Member engagement and collaborative opportunities.

THE AREAS THAT YOU TOLD US TO DO LESS OF:

- Complicated processes: Credentialling, CPD logging, and digital access
- Barriers to participation: Procedural and structural barriers, particularly around accreditation and rural access
- Corporate tone: using a bureaucratic tone out of touch with social work values.

WORK SETTINGS

Work settings 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. 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.

Other areas of work included Higher Education Providers (10%), for-profit (6%), local government (4%), Federal government (4%), Aboriginal Community Controlled (2%), and other fields (9%).

PRIMARY FIELD OF WORK

The survey reveals a broad range of practice areas within the social work profession, highlighting the diversity of roles and specialisations. It highlights the importance of how the AASW considers the breadth of member resources to support the varied fields of social work.

The most common fields of practice among respondents were mental health (50%), counselling (39%), clinical social work (25%), child/family support (25%), family violence (20%), disability (19%), supervision (18%), hospital/health (17%), addiction, alcohol and other drugs (16%) and child protection (15%), 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.

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

The survey results highlight a diverse range of experience levels within the social work profession. Close to a quarter (24%) of respondents have less than five years of experience, indicating a strong presence of early-career social workers. 20% have between 5-10 years of experience, suggesting a significant proportion of mid-career professionals. 33% have over 20 years' experience, with 1% of respondents having more than 50 years' experience.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Survey respondents represented a range of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds.

20% identified as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, indicating a significant proportion of social workers with diverse heritage. 13% spoke a language other than English at home, reflecting linguistic diversity within the profession. 3% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, highlighting the presence of First Nations social workers. However, the majority of respondents (68%) did not identify with these categories, and 4% preferred not to disclose their background.

SUMMARY

The survey insights are invaluable in guiding our operational plans, ensuring that we address the key priorities and concerns of social workers across Australia. By capturing a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, the survey highlights the variety within the profession, from early-career professionals to seasoned experts, and across various fields of practice. This comprehensive feedback enables the AASW to tailor our strategies to better support and advocate for social workers.

As a result from your feedback, we will be increasing our focus to communicate the initiatives we're undertaking on your key priorities: to uphold standards, professional recognition and parity, advocacy and policy, amplifying social work and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership & Culturally Responsive Practice.

We are committed to making changes based on your input and will keep you updated on developments and opportunities for involvement.



Latest Continuing Professional Development: looking forward through innovation

These upcoming workshops delve into emerging knowledge and innovative approaches that are shaping the future of social work. Designed for social workers across all career stages, these events offer opportunities to stay ahead in a rapidly evolving profession.

The Nervous System in Trauma Work - Using Polyvagal Theory to Understand and Address Clients' Behaviours

- Date: 28 August 2025
- Time: 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM (AEST)
- CPD Hours: 1.5 hrs

This webinar explores how Polyvagal Theory provides a framework to understand the nervous system's response to trauma and how to support clients in achieving safety and arousal regulation.

Keeping Kids Connected - A Resilience Focused Journey

- Date: 1 September 2025
- Time: 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM (AEST)
- CPD Hours: 1.5 hrs

This session examines how CatholicCare Wollongong utilised over a decade of school counselling data and a resilience framework to develop an early intervention program supporting the wellbeing of students from Kindergarten to Year 6.

Advanced Supervision Program

- Commencement date: 2 September 2025
- Duration: 8 weeks (concludes on 21 October 2025)
- CPD Hours: 20 hrs

An evidence-based program combining self-paced eLearning, online collaborative workshops, facilitator-led masterclasses, and coaching circles to enhance supervisory skills.

Our commitment to professional development has transformed traditional lectures into engaging, high-quality resources that empower social workers. Crafted by social workers for social workers, and guided by our learning and development staff, our training programs are designed to enhance the professional toolkit, enabling practitioners to continue their life-changing work within the community.

Meet the Employer:

helping emerging social workers step into their careers

The AASW's first *Meet the Employer* national webinar on 27 March brought together social work students, graduates, and employers from across Australia for an engaging and informative session.

Just under one hundred new social workers enjoyed presentations from leading organisations including Services Australia, headspace, and Relationships Australia. Participants gained valuable insights into career pathways, the job application process, and what to expect in their early professional years.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with attendees sharing:

"Thank you so much for this session. As a new grad, this has been so valuable."

"Thank you all for your time and inputs, appreciate AASW for organising this!"

"I appreciate all of the guests and organisers for this event. Thank you very much!"

"Thank you to the panel and AASW for this session. It's been really great to hear all your tips."

"Such valuable information and tips. Thank you for the session!"

Following the success of the national event, the AASW rolled out a series of region-specific *Meet the Employer* sessions throughout May and June, tailored to connect local employers with students and recent graduates in Victoria, the Northern Territory, ACT/ New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, and South Australia.

Each session offered a deep dive into the realities of professional practice in different contexts, covering daily responsibilities, recruitment tips, and the chance to engage directly with employer representatives during live Q&A panels.

Navigating life after university can be tricky, but the AASW has you covered. Through programs like *Meet the Employer*, we're here to support emerging social workers as they take their first steps into practice.

"I found the webinar very useful – I'm actually liaising with my university now for a placement with one of the presenters"

Victorian social work student



Social work students and graduates, kickstart your career with direct access to some of Australia's major social work employers.

Register today for our next national *Meet the Employer* webinar on 30 October 2025.

Learn more at:
aasw.asn.au/meet-the-employer

Free for
AASW
members



Social worker spotlight: Sunita Kotnala

Sunita Kotnala is the CEO of the Women's Shed in Canberra which opened in 2020. Since then, it's become a thriving hub where women of all ages learn, tinker, and build confidence through practical, inclusive workshops led by tradeswomen.

The Canberra Women's Shed is a community organisation designed to

provide a space where women can come together to share skills, learn new ones, and work on various projects. Similar to traditional men's sheds, it focuses on fostering camaraderie, creativity, and personal development among its members.

Named Canberra Citizen of the Year in 2025, Sunita continues to expand the

shed's reach with a mobile program and a bold vision: a world where women don't need permission to pick up a tool and take the lead.

[Read more](#)



Social worker spotlight: Dr Josephine Lee

Dr Josephine Lee is a proud Gudjula woman from North Queensland whose nearly 30-year career in social work stands as a powerful testament to cultural resilience, transformative healing, and a deep commitment to anti-oppressive practice. As a Senior Aboriginal Social Worker supporting children, families, and schools across remote Northern Territory communities, Josephine does not simply work in social services; she lives and breathes the values at its core.

In recognition of her extraordinary contribution to the profession and to communities across the NT, Josephine was recently awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Social Work by Charles Darwin University.

Growing up in Australia, Josephine's understanding of social justice, healing, and community responsibility was forged from lived experience. Her approach to social work is shaped not by textbook theory, but by the wisdom

passed down through her family, the strength of her cultural roots, and the realities of life on Country. Her practice is guided by an unwavering belief in the dignity, capability, and healing potential of her people.

[Read more](#)

Professional news & views

TANYA PLIBERSEK NAMED NEW MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

Tanya Plibersek has been appointed as Minister for Social Services following a cabinet reshuffle in May. The move has been welcomed by the sector, with Catholic Social Services Australia noting her experience and long-standing commitment to social justice. Plibersek replaces Amanda Rishworth and is expected to play a key role in overseeing NDIS reforms and broader social policy.

[Read more](#)

NDIS PROVIDER OUTLOOK HIGHLIGHTS SECTOR PRESSURES

Technology firm Drova has released its 2025 NDIS Provider Outlook Report, identifying key challenges and opportunities facing disability service providers. The report outlines six strategic areas for attention, including digital transformation, workforce stability, and service integration. It provides a roadmap for providers navigating reforms and funding changes across the sector.

[Read more](#)



AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND'S HEALTH WORKFORCE STRETCHED AS CLINICIANS COVER ADMIN ROLES

In Aotearoa New Zealand, cuts to non-clinical roles in the health system are forcing frontline staff—such as social workers and nurses—to take on administrative duties, including working as receptionists. Te Whatu Ora (Health New Zealand) has confirmed that back-office redundancies, aimed at saving \$63 million annually, have impacted over 1,100 roles.

[Read more](#)

THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (AASW) HAS JOINED THE NOW OR NEVER CAMPAIGN.

The Now or Never campaign calls for meaningful reforms to service pricing to safeguard participant outcomes, by ensuring that high-quality, person-centred care remains at the heart of the NDIS.

The AASW joins other associations collectively urging government to commit to sustainable reforms that will secure the long-term viability and integrity of the scheme.

The AASW urges all members, social workers, and the broader community to stand with us – sign the petition and add your voice to the growing call for urgent reform.

[Learn more](#)



NEW RESEARCH LINKS REPEATED CLIMATE DISASTERS TO DECLINING MENTAL HEALTH

A landmark study from the University of Melbourne, published in The Lancet Public Health, has found that repeated exposure to climate-related disasters significantly worsens mental health—and slows recovery. The research, which tracked over 1,500 Australians exposed to disasters like floods, bushfires, and cyclones from 2009 to 2019, found that mental health outcomes deteriorate further when disasters occur within shorter timeframes, such as one to two years apart.

[Read more](#)

[Lancet article](#)

Explore our On Demand CPD catalogue: flexible, affordable, and up to date

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is essential for social workers to maintain high standards of ethical and informed practice. It supports ongoing learning, enhances professional competence, and ensures social workers remain equipped to respond to the evolving needs of the individuals, families, and communities they serve.

Looking to grow your professional knowledge at your own pace? The AASW's On Demand Category 2 CPD catalogue offers over 200 high-quality training titles, available for purchase and access at your convenience.

Whether you're refreshing your skills or diving into new areas of practice, there's something for everyone.

Why choose AASW On Demand CPD?

- Reviewed annually to ensure content is current, relevant and in-line with best practice
- Learn at your own pace – anywhere, anytime
- Covers a diverse range of topics including Domestic Violence, Older Persons, Animal Therapy, School Social Work and more
- Affordable curated training packages to help ease cost of living pressures – save up to 30%.



Training packages available:

- Starter Pack
- Supporting Neurodivergent Clients in Social Work
- Self Care in Social Work
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy
- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
- School Social Work in Action
- Diversity and Inclusion in School Social Work
- Mastering Focussed Psychological Strategies
- Responding to Family Violence – A Social Work Approach.

Invest in your learning, your way

Explore forward thinking in practice through AASW's On Demand Learning Library

The AASW's On Demand Learning platform continues to grow, offering over 180 titles tailored to social workers and allied health professionals seeking flexible, high-quality professional development. Our learning library includes a dedicated stream of CPD exploring innovation, sustainability, and the profession's evolving role in environmental and disaster contexts.

From climate action and post-disaster response to real-world graduate insights and applied interviewing skills, AASW members can access timely, expert-led content – anytime, anywhere.

SOCIAL WORK IN THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY: ROLES, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

CPD Hours: 1

This webinar discusses social work in the climate emergency, including roles, challenges, and opportunities for the social work profession.

Rated ★★★★★ 4.4/5 stars by attendees.

SOCIAL WORKERS FOR CLIMATE ACTION – SERIES

CPD Hours: 3
(1 hour each, across 3 sessions)

A practical three-part series covering: setting the scene, talking it through, and making it real. Ideal for graduate and emerging practitioners, this series connects climate action to frontline practice.

Rated ★★★★★ 5/5 stars by attendees.

POST-DISASTER RESPONSE: SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY FOR CLIENTS AFTER A NATURAL DISASTER

CPD Hours: 1.5

Understand the critical role of social workers in the aftermath of natural disasters. Includes strategies for immediate and long-term support. 99% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that content delivered matched what they were expecting.

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE: INTERVIEWING SKILLS

CPD Hours: 1

Interviewing skills are essential for creating positive relationships with clients, connecting authentically, and communicating effectively.

Rated ★★★★★ 4.4/5 stars by attendees.

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE: RISK ASSESSMENT & CASE FORMULATION

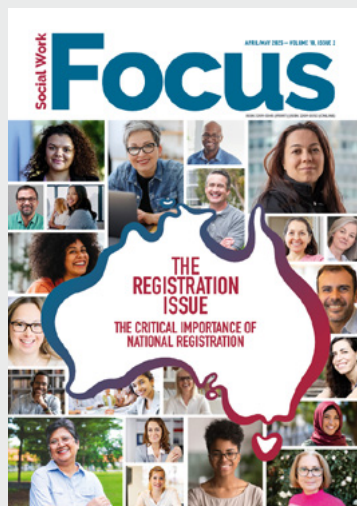
CPD Hours: 2

These online, on-demand modules allow participants to practice core social work skills, including risk assessment, case formulation, critical thinking, and decision making, within a secure virtual environment.

Rated ★★★★★ 4.2/5 stars by attendees.

Whether you are stepping into practice or exploring advanced leadership, the AASW's On Demand Learning empowers you to drive change in a rapidly evolving professional landscape.

[**Explore all sessions and register now**](#)



Social Work Focus

ADVERTISING

Social Work Focus is the Australian Association of Social Workers' Member magazine. It is published four times a year and is accessible to Members through MyAASW in the flipbook style.

You can advertise in *Social Work Focus*.

Social Work Focus advertising rates 2025

Full Colour	Single Edition Rate	4-Edition Rate
Full page (inside covers)	\$1,320	\$3,696 (\$924 per advert)
Full page (back cover)	\$1,595	\$4,466 (\$1,116 per advert)
Full page	\$2,020	\$5,656 (\$1,414 per advert)
Half page (horizontal)	\$755	\$2,114 (\$529 each)
Quarter page (horizontal)	\$440	\$1,232 (\$308 each)

Prices are inclusive of GST

Advertising Specifications (Sizes)

Full page 210 x 297mm Plus 3mm bleed	Half page horizontal 192 x 132mm Horizontal	Quarter page horizontal 192 x 74mm Horizontal

KEY:	Artwork area	Note: Measurements are width x height
	Bleed (min 3mm)	
	Page trim	

To Book Your Print Advertisement

To discuss your [advertising needs](#), email marketing@aasw.asn.au.

Supplying Artwork

AASW will only accept final art that is supplied as a print ready, high resolution PDF with minimum 3mm bleed and crop marks. Minimum of 10mm margins are recommended for full page ads. All images must be 300 dpi.

Please send your artwork to marketing@aasw.asn.au

Please check that the size of your advertisement reflects our specifications.

2025 SWF Advertising Deadline Dates

Issue	Artwork Deadline	Publication Date
September/October	29 August 2025	Week commencing 15 September 2025
November/December	24 October 2025	Week commencing 10 November 2025