

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of members
held on Thursday, 10 November 2022 between 4:00pm and 4:42pm
Boardroom, Level 7, 14-20 Blackwood Street, North Melbourne, Victoria
and by webinar**

Directors in attendance in Melbourne: Vittorio Cintio (National President, Chair of the Board and of the meeting), Julianne Whyte

Directors in attendance on-line: Linda Ford (National Vice President), Elisha Ebdon, Suzanne Doorackers-Sprague, Susan Green, Fotina Hardy, Brooke Koymans

Management in attendance in Melbourne: Cindy Smith (CEO), Geoff Bennett (Company Secretary), Nathan Watts (Chief Financial Officer), Alene McGowan (Executive Assistant to the CEO)

Members in attendance in Melbourne and on-line: As per the attendance register, including the 2022 AGM Zoom attendance register

The Chair opened the meeting with an *Acknowledgement of Country*.

Attendance, apologies, and introductions

The Chair advised that more 70 members were in attendance at the AGM venue or on-line and that a quorum was present. No formal apologies had been received. No proxies were received, as no matters were on the Agenda that required a vote from Members.

The Agenda was taken as read and proceedings were outlined.

The Chair introduced the Board of Directors and the newly elected Directors, Jessica Russ-Smith and Chris Hannan. The Chair noted that Messrs Russ-Smith and Hannan would take their place on the Board at the conclusion of the AGM.

The Chair acknowledged the contribution of outgoing Director Suzanne Doorackers-Sprague and thanked Ms. Doorackers-Sprague for her service as a Director and more particularly, as Chair of the Finance, Audit, Compliance and Risk Committee and a member of the Constitution Review Committee.

The Chair then turned to matters listed on the Agenda.

Ordinary Business – Agenda item 1 – National President’s Report

The National President outlined the significant and ongoing achievements of the Association over the last year.

He noted that AASW remains in an excellent position to continue growth and expand its service delivery. The goals established by the Board in the 2021-2023 Strategic Plan, are being met or exceeded through the collaborative work of AASW Board and Senior Leadership Team.

The National President outlined several strategic wins for the Association and the profession.

He noted that in December 2021, South Australia was the first State to pass legislation to regulate the social work profession. Decades of joint advocacy from the South Australian Branch Management Committee and the AASW brought to bear a legislative change that was crucial to giving concrete professional status to social workers and, importantly, providing reassurance to service users. AASW continues to work closely with the government in South Australia to implement the model.

The National President acknowledged the Association's achievements in obtaining billing opportunities for AMHSWs. He referenced BUPA's decision to include AMHSW services as part of their ancillary cover. BUPA is one of the single largest private health funds in Australia with more than four million members. Much like the legislation in South Australia, the deal that the Association brokered with BUPA is now drawing other funds around the negotiating table, which the Association expects will represent further value to members and the public soon.

The National President highlighted the work of the Editorial Board, which produces the Association's quarterly journal: *Australian Social Work*. Accepted papers to the journal are highly prized by researchers, making the journal a must-read for fellow academics and practitioners. The National President paid tribute to, and thanked, the retiring Editorial Board Chair of *Australian Social Work*, Dr. Rosalie Pockett along with the Editor, Fiona McDermott. Dr. Pockett has been Editorial Board Chair for six years and Associate Professor McDermott Editor for five years. Through their joint efforts, the *Australian Social Work* journal has been taken to a whole new level. *Australian Social Work* is now ranked in Quartile 1 of internationally ranked publications with a Journal Impact Factor of 2.579 in 2021, compared to 1.915 in 2020.

The National President informed Members that a collaboration partnership with a major law firm would be announced at the Mental Health Symposium to be held on 17 November 2022. The partnership promises to bring additional benefits to members.

The National President thanked fellow Board members for their ongoing commitment and stewardship of the Association. The collaboration he referenced in his addressed to Members was made possible by the unwavering leadership of Cindy Smith, the AASW's CEO, the Senior Leadership Team and the many volunteers who give their time selflessly in service of bettering the profession.

Ordinary Business – Agenda item 2 – CEO's report on operations

The CEO acknowledged the efforts of an agile, creative, and versatile team at AASW, over the last year.

The CEO highlighted the growth and specialisation of the Association's member services team, the investment in and expanded the reach of the member HUB along with new CPD options to members. These initiatives, she noted, all add value and create connections for members regardless of where they live.

The CEO highlighted the introduction of the AASW National Excellence Awards this year, which celebrates significant contributions made to the profession. She had the privilege of announcing the winners at the AASW Asia-Pacific Regional Social Work Conference last year and met them in person, post COVID lockdowns. She congratulated Mark Silver, Wilma Peters, AJ Williams-Tchen and Chloe Span on winning the profession's most prestigious awards.

The CEO was pleased to report that the Association was a finalist in two categories of the Australian Institute of Training and Development Excellence Awards 2022. The AASW CPD team codesigned the Advanced Supervision Training with Family Safety Victoria. The training focuses on supervising casework in the support of complex families. Until the AASW developed this training, nothing similar was available despite the issue being raised in key recommendations in Coronial, Royal Commission and State Ombudsman reports, highlighting deficits in the area. The program is now being routinely delivered and is receiving excellent feedback. The same model is now being revised for other areas (from family violence to child protection) and is being rolled out.

The CEO noted that the Association is looking to significantly enhance the individualised member support system. She referenced growth in the Online Community Hub over the last year, noting that every specialist group represented within the Hub, is growing in member participation.

The CEO noted that the NDIS has provided participating members with social worker-specific item numbers, for the first time. Identifying social workers in this way further embeds the social work profession, in the health system. This also bodes well for the growth of the Association's Accredited Disability Social Worker credential.

The CEO highlighted AASW's podcast service, *Social Work People*. It is hosted by the Association's Senior Policy Adviser, Angela Scarfe. Her ability to unearth the incredible stories of our most distinguished members in such a compelling way is incredible. Again: the podcasts are growing in listeners, as the stories of social workers should. The CEO thanked all the podcast guests for sharing their stories.

The CEO reported that another highlight for the year was the Association's Mentoring Program. This year, the Association completed the first cycle of the program and began the next. There was a growth in participants in the second cycle and we improved the program with more resources and made it easier to apply. This is another example of a borderless service, with pairings based on compatibility of interests, rather than location.

The CEO acknowledged the Association's commitment to Reconciliation by actioning the goals set in the Association's third Reconciliation Action Plan 2020-2022. The Association is committed to raising the voices and ensuring participation of First Nations social workers through staff cultural awareness training, participating in National Reconciliation Week, AASW's stance on 26 January, NAIDOC and offering a limited number of free registration spaces for First Nations peoples at major events hosted by the Association.

The CEO advised that the Association continues to refine its obligations to uphold the standards of the profession. As a self-regulated profession, a portion of members' fees goes into regulatory functions, such as providing an ethics complaints management service, accrediting social work degrees, and ensuring compliance to CPD for credential-holders. As our financial statements disclose: the AASW absorbs the cost of these functions, while the Associations of regulated professions have AHPRA to perform them instead. Once professional registration is implemented, it will be compulsory for all social

workers to complete CPD and we are preparing the Association and the profession for that, as our dramatic growth in CPD offerings show.

The CEO acknowledged the Association's participation in World Social Work Day events, National Reconciliation Week and various rallies in Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane. While we are still living with COVID-19, the Association continued to meet the needs of members, notwithstanding the environment we work in.

Agenda Item 3 – Directors' report, financial statements, and auditor's report

The National President relayed the apology of Mr. Eric Hummer, the Association's external auditor. To the extent that there was a question from Members related to the audit of the accounts, the National President offered to take the question on notice, relay the question to the external auditor and provide a written response to the Member.

The National President noted that the Association's financial statements, directors' reports and external audit report were provided to Members last month and were available on the Association's website.

He reported that the Association remains in a good financial position. Although the Association recorded a slight deficit for the year (which was planned), Members' equity was just shy of \$3.0 million. The Association has no debt and current assets exceed current liabilities. During this time, the Association has continued to invest in the infrastructure necessary to make the Association efficient, effective, and more accessible to Members. This includes significant upgrades to our IT systems, particularly our website "front end" and Customer Relationship Management platforms.

The National President once again thanked Suzanne Doorackers-Sprague for her stewardship of the Association's Finance, Audit, Compliance and Risk Committee.

Agenda item 4 – Appointment of Life Members

The National President announced Mr Doug Burke and Professor Donna McAuliffe as Life Members of the Association. The National President outlined the significant contribution each recipient had made to both the Association and the profession.

Questions from Members

At this point, the National President fielded questions from Members, including those submitted in advance of the meeting.

On eligibility criteria for the Mental Health Social Worker Accreditation

The National President responded that there were no major changes to the eligibility criteria for mental health accreditation. One minor change occurred when CPD requirements were reduced from 50 hours to 30 hours. The last major change that occurred was procedural. In 2020, credential application forms transitioned from hard copy files to an online application format. In addition, case studies changed from being a component of the application form itself to now include an invigilator to oversight the case study process. Applicants have 15 minutes reading time and a 3-hour window to complete 2 case studies. The word count of 1500 words per case study remains the same.

On the school social worker credential and low-cost professional learning opportunities for members

The National President reiterated the benefits of the Association's credentialing programme, noting that in general: credentials were a demonstration of the competence that a social worker has acquired to provide both a safe and high-quality service. The school social worker credential formally acknowledges the social worker's specialist skills, experience, and capabilities in a specific area of social work, which leads to opportunity. A specialised credential (such as the school social worker credential) is a symbol to the community, other professionals, employers, and the public that you understand the unique challenges in a key area of social work, have committed to ongoing professional development and have been assessed to have the specific skills that they need.

On the matter of access to low-cost CPD

The National President referred the Member to the Association's monthly online webinars and virtual workshops on diverse topics related to all AASW credentials, as well as leadership and supervision. He noted that lower CPD fees for members are offered regularly. The National President directed the member to a CPD event to be held later in the month – an online seminar - focussing on self-care strategies for social workers - available at \$30 for members.

In addition: the Association has a catalogue of over 100 on-demand courses and recordings via the Association's *Social Work Online Training* platform. There are currently over 20 items available free for members in this platform. Information on all the Association's CPD programs can be found on the AASW website.

On religious discrimination in football clubs

The National President reiterated the Association's commitment to promote its social conscience, *Code of Ethics* and social justice principles for the benefit of all sections of society, including religious groups, as it has done over the last 76 years.

On the speed and functionality of the AASW website

The CEO anticipates that the revamped AASW website will be launched in February 2023.

On Medicare Better Access additional support during COVID-19

The CEO was unable to confirm whether the extra support for people who have a mental health treatment plan in place or are enduring mental health impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, would be extended beyond 31 December 2022 under the *Medicare Better Access Scheme*. Nonetheless: the Association had aligned with other allied health professions calling for the extra support scheme to be extended.

On how the Association was spending Members' money

The Company Secretary pointed Members to the 2022 Annual Report, which they could find on the Association's website. The Annual Report provides a breakdown of revenue booked for the financial year, along with a breakdown of expenditure incurred. The Report also provides Members with a Statement of Financial Position, Statement of Comprehensive Income and a Statement of Cash Flows.

On national Registration of social workers

The CEO advised that AASW was working with the South Australian government to develop that State's Registration model, from concept to practical application. However, the Association's objective remains for national registration of social workers via the APRHA model.

Locating supervisors that specialise in the NDIS field

The CEO noted that some supervisors had promoted their expertise on the Association's website but regrettably, in doing so, had ticked "all the boxes" of specialisation, making it difficult for someone to try and identify a social worker with specialist skills.

The CEO advised that the revamped website, to be launched next year, will provide some refinement in being able to identify specific categories of speciality, which should make it easier for Members to locate and connect with a specialist supervisor.

On dual affiliation with AASW and AHPRA (if Registration is achieved)

The CEO responded that in the scenario that social workers were required to be registered with AHPRA, and someone held the credential of Accredited Mental Health Social Worker, then it is likely that Registration with both AHPRA and AASW would be required. This is because Registration with the regulator would likely be the "baseline" for the profession and credentials was fall outside of AHPRA's remit as a requirement of the AASW. CPD a core requirement of Registration. AHPRA does not offer CPD and it is for these reasons that AASW is focusing much more on CPD and on building credentials, than previously.

Closing remarks

The National President thanked his fellow Board Members, the CEO and the entire Leadership Team for their professionalism and dedication. None of the achievements over the past year would have been possible without the Association's growing and thriving membership.

There being no further business, the National President closed the meeting at 4:42pm.