



AASW
Australian Association
of Social Workers

Live webinar Pushing for change

14 May 2025





Acknowledgement of Country

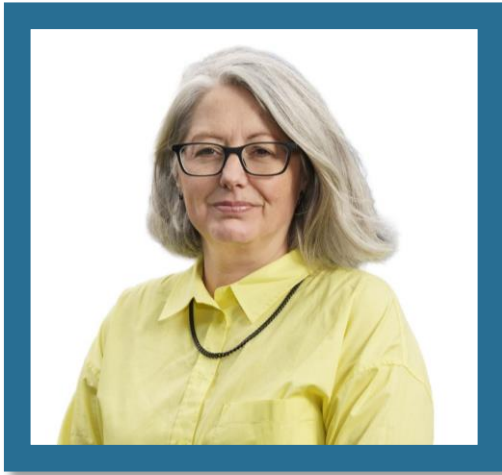
We respectfully acknowledge the past and present Traditional Owners and ongoing Custodians of the lands upon which we meet. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present, their ancestors and their families, and to Elders of other communities who may be present.

Artwork: Professor Wayne Quilliam
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Overview

- Welcome
- Housekeeping
 - Please put your questions into the Q & A function
 - Slides will be published
 - Session will be recorded
- Overview of webinar
 - Why we need national registration
 - Overview of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS)
 - Registration of paramedics
 - AASW advocacy to date
 - Where to next – how you can support advocacy
 - Q & A
- You can contact the Social Policy and Advocacy Team on social.policy@aasw.asn.au

Meet our speakers



Cindy Smith

CEO

AASW



Jim Arneman

**ACT Ambulance
Service**

Formerly National
Council of Ambulances



Dominic Szeker

Senior Policy Advisor

AASW



Angela Scarfe

Facilitator

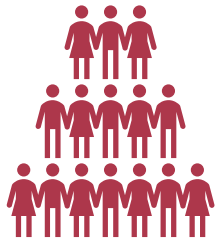
AASW

WHY DO WE NEED NATIONAL REGISTRATION?

Setting the scene

Cindy Smith

The social work profession in Australia



Significant workforce growth

- **47,700** employed social workers (2025)
- **3,100** annual employment growth



Increasing students and education providers

- **21,000+** students (2024)
- **40** Higher Education Providers



Move towards private practice service delivery models

- **3,029** AASW members in Private Practice
- **3,655** Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs)

International regulation of social workers

Aotearoa New Zealand



Mandatory registration
(2023)
Voluntary registration
(2003)

Canada



Provinces regulate
social workers
(1968 – 1998)

United States



California (1945)
Most US jurisdictions
have multi-tiered
licensure

United Kingdom



England (2001)
Ireland (2011)
Scotland (2003)
Wales (2016)

Why registration is needed in Australia

1

To ensure all social workers have the skills and knowledge to practise safely

2

To ensure people are protected from harm and misconduct

Why registration is needed in Australia

- Working with **vulnerable and at-risk people** in the community
- No **title protection** of ‘social worker’ in Australia.
 - People without a social work qualification are employed as a social workers.
 - They do not have the appropriate education, training, skills and experience.
- **Two thirds of the profession** not required to adhere to nationally consistent standards of social work practice (*AASW Practice Standards*) and conduct (*AASW Code of Ethics*).

Chloe Valentine: Coronial Inquest

Tragic death of Chloe Valentine

- Chloe Valentine died after being forced to ride a bike and repeatedly crashed while her mother and partner filmed.
- Chloe lived in squalor with domestic violence and drug use.

Coronial Inquest Findings

- Social work students (not yet qualified) working directly with clients
- Lack of clinical social work supervision
- Some social workers had poor quality of practice.

Coroner Recommendation

- “I recommend that a measure be introduced which provides for registration of social workers.” (South Australia State Coroner Mark Johns, 2015)

Coroner reports – the importance of the right skills and knowledge

Darren Bracken, Victorian Coroner (PFS)

“Social workers are often employed to work with vulnerable communities. The lack of accountability in this work raises concerning implications for their clients.

National registration and accreditation of social workers would:

- assist in defining and protecting professional educational and practice standards
- define safe and competent scopes of practice for social work
- require mandatory hours of annual continuing professional development in order to ensure skills and knowledge remain up to date.”

Anthony Schapel, Deputy South Australia State Coroner (Amber Rigney & Korey Mitchell)

“What this inquest has highlighted, however, is the folly of governments ignoring coronial and other recommendations.”

Serious misconduct: Prohibition Orders

- Health Complaints Prohibition Orders
- Predatory conduct and bad faith actors
- Professional boundary violations and sexual relationships
- Use of information shared within therapeutic relationship
- Significant impact on victims

Limitations of AASW self-regulation of social work

Self-regulation model is insufficient to protect the public

- No statutory powers
- Membership with the AASW is voluntary
- Most social workers are not members of AASW
- Refusal of AASW membership due to misconduct is the strongest protection available to the Association.

Poor social work practice and ethical misconduct is occurring

- Evidence of misconduct and poor social work practice includes:
 - Complaints to AASW Ethics and Complaints Management Process
 - Complaints to health complaints bodies and other regulators.

South Australia Social Workers Registration Scheme

- Passage of the *Social Workers Registration Act 2021 (SA)*
- Led by Social Workers Registration Board (not AASW)
- Social work registration in South Australia will begin on 1 July 2025
- Important step forward for the profession in Australia
- We need to move towards national registration



**Social Workers
Registration Board**
South Australia



Government
of South Australia

Overview of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS)

Dominic Szeker

National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS)

NRAS is one scheme for registered health professionals in Australia.

Purpose of NRAS:

1. Protect the public from harm
2. Set consistent, high-quality education and practice standards
3. Facilitate workforce mobility and avoids multiple schemes.

16 Registered Professions in NRAS

Chiropractors

Dental practitioners

Medical practitioners

Nurses

Midwives

Optometrists

Osteopaths

Pharmacists

Physiotherapists

Podiatrists

Psychologists

Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander health (2012)

Chinese medicine (2012)

Medical radiation (2012)

Occupational therapists
(2012)

Paramedics (2018)

How does NRAS work?



The National Law

- Provides the legal foundation for scheme
- Align all states and territories

National Boards

- Sets standards for the profession
- Education and accreditation standards
- CPD requirements
- Recency of practice requirements

Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra)

- Online register of practitioners
- Takes complaints (notifications) about practitioners
- Administers fees

NRAS is the best model for social worker registration

- Well established best practice in Australian health regulation
- Established in 2010 and currently regulates 900,000+ practitioners in Australia
- Regulation of social workers is comparable with psychologists and occupational therapists
- Has existing organisational infrastructure to administer the scheme

What would national registration look like for members?

- Ahpra is a separate body and independent from the AASW
- All qualified practising social workers would be included in the scheme
- Continuing Professional Development (and supervision) standards
- Ahpra registration fees (tax deductible)
- Professional Indemnity Insurance requirements (included in AASW membership)
- Complaints handled by Ahpra/National Boards (under review – Complexity Review)

How do we achieve national registration?

- AASW to make submission to Health Ministers process:
 - Addresses six criteria for entry
 - Provide evidence base to demonstrate need for regulation.
- Key decision-makers to include a profession:
 - Ministers for Health (Health Minister's Meeting)
 - Heads of Health Departments (Health Chief Executives Forum).

Social work must satisfy 6 criteria for inclusion in NRAS

- Criteria 1:** Is it appropriate for **Health Ministers** to exercise responsibility for regulating the occupation in question, or does the occupation more appropriately fall within the domain of another Ministry?
- Criteria 2:** Do the activities of the occupation **pose a significant risk of harm** to the health and safety of the public?
- Criteria 3:** Do existing regulatory or **other mechanisms fail** to address health and safety issues?
- Criteria 4 & 5:** Is regulation **possible and practical** to implement for the occupation in question?
- Criteria 6:** Do the **benefits clearly outweigh the potential negative** impact of regulation?

Steps to registration through NRAS



Registration of Paramedics

Jim Arneman



PARAMEDIC NATIONAL REGISTRATION OUR JOURNEY

AASW

May 14 2025

Jim Arneman
Registered Paramedic
(Intensive Care)
Former ACAU National
Registration Project Officer

Outline

- ▣ **Australasian Council of Ambulance Unions**
- ▣ **Our rationale for national regulation & registration**
- ▣ **Our ten-year timeline**
- ▣ **A way forward for Social Workers...**

Australasian Council of Ambulance Unions

- ▣ Formed in 2008 to advance issues of national importance to paramedics
- ▣ To facilitate and coordinate national campaigns
- ▣ To develop policy and make representations to governments on issues impacting paramedics nationally.

Our Rationale for Pursuing Regulation

- *Public Safety*
- *Flexibility in employment*
- *Portability of qualifications*
- *Protection of Title*
- *Consistent & transparent handling of complaints and fitness to practice issues.*

Our Timeline

2008

National Council of Ambulance Unions (NCAU, now ACAU) formed

2009

ABC 4 Corners '***Out of Time***' detailed 4 deaths arising from systems failures causing inadequate ambulance responses in WA.

2009

Health Practitioner National Law Act (Cwth)

2010

National Regulation & Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) implemented out of National Law Act

Our Timeline (2)

2010

WA Government put a formal proposal to ***Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council*** (a sub-committee of the ***Council of Australian Governments – COAG***) to include paramedics as a profession in the ***NRAS*** (the National Scheme)

2012

ACAU and Paramedics Australasia signed a joint agreement to work collaboratively to pursue Paramedic National Registration.

2012

After significant lobbying of state & territory ministers, a COAG consultation regulatory impact paper ***‘Options for the Regulation of Paramedics’*** (the Consultation Paper) was released in 2012 by the Health Workforce Principal Committee (HWPC) for stakeholders for submissions

Our Timeline (3)

Four options canvassed in the *Consultation Paper* included

1. Do nothing – rely on existing regulatory and non-regulatory mechanisms
2. Strengthen statutory health complaint mechanisms, statutory codes of conduct and powers to prohibit those who breach the code from continuing to provide health services
3. Strengthen State & Territory regulation of paramedics
4. Registration of Paramedics through the National Scheme

Two criteria needed to be satisfied for paramedic inclusion in the National Scheme:

1. The profession undertakes demonstrably high-risk interventions
2. That actual harm has been demonstrated arising from incidents that impacted public safety

Our Timeline (4)

2012-2014

'About Paramedic Regulation' produced; significant consultation; lobbying; national forums and information sessions; further consultation period called for by **Office of Best Practice Regulation** (now **Office of Impact Analysis – Dept of PM&C**) to allow further public & stakeholder feedback; independent review of NRAS undertaken; submissions closed for **Regulatory Impact Statement** (RIS); COAG consideration of submissions and recommendations.

2015

In November, the COAG Health Council issued a communique broadly supporting inclusion of Paramedics in the National Scheme, **on an opt out basis**, to enable NSW dissent, undermining the benefits of a truly national scheme.

Our Timeline (5)

2015

In August ACAU affiliates in Queensland approached **Senator Glenn Lazarus** to lobby for a Senate Inquiry into the delays in implementing a national registration of paramedics

2016

In January, the **Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs Standing Committee** established a Senate Inquiry into '***The establishment of a national registration system for Australian paramedics to improve and ensure patient safety***'

2016

In May the senate inquiry tabled its recommendation: that paramedics be nationally registered and that all states and territories participate.

In October all state & territory health ministers agreed to amend the **National Law** to enable incorporation of paramedics into to NRAS

Our Timeline (6)

2017

In June, the Queensland Parliament introduced the amended legislation giving effect to paramedic registration. A ***National Law Stakeholder Implementation Committee*** was established to work through final details and amendments.

2018

On December 1st, paramedics formally entered the NRAS and paramedicine became a regulated profession, overseen by AHPRA, under the governance of the Paramedicine Board.

A Way Forward for AASW

- ▣ ***Stakeholder cooperation & collaboration*** is paramount. Shared positions are key to success.
- ▣ Strike a balance between ***benefits for practitioners*** and ***public safety*** in your messaging.
- ▣ Engage with the ***Office of Impact Analysis*** (Dept of Prime Minister & Cabinet) early.
- ▣ ***Lobby state & territory stakeholders*** for support, pushing benefits of a national approach.
- ▣ Think in terms of what ***demonstrably high-risk interventions you undertake*** along with ***examples of actual harm that has been demonstrated***, arising from incidents impacting public safety.

Contact Details:

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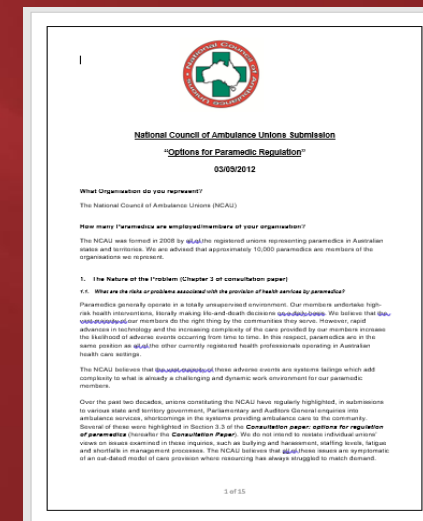
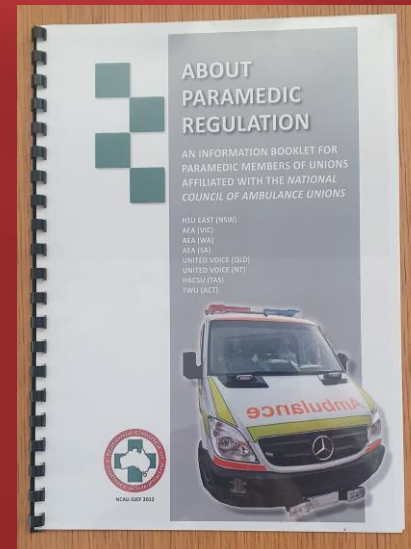
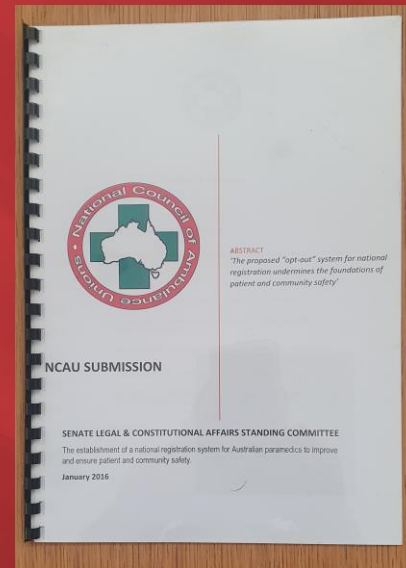
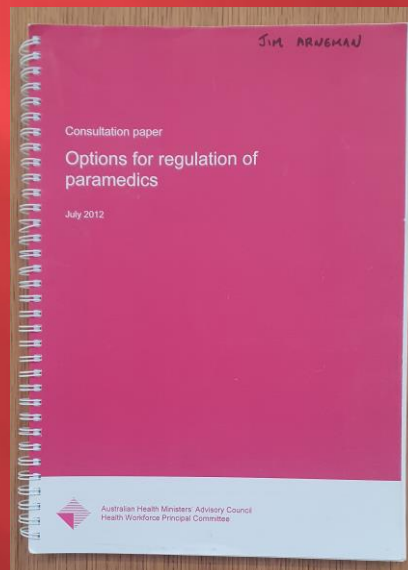
References

- Consultation Paper - Options for Regulation of Paramedics

<https://oia.pmc.gov.au/published-impact-analyses-and-reports/options-regulation-paramedics-coag-consultation-regulation>

- Senate Paramedic Registration Inquiry 2017

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Paramedics



Where are we now?

Dominic Szeker

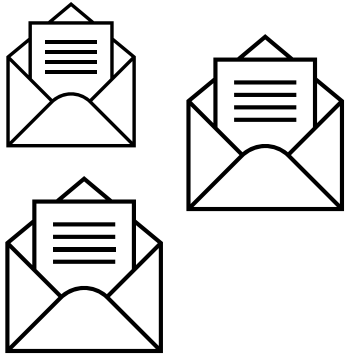
Our advocacy and policy work to date

- Passage of the *Social Workers Registration Act 2021* (SA)
- Recommendations and actions in reviews and report
 - Scope of Practice Review (Professor Cormack)
 - Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into Administration of Ahpra under the National Law
 - Victoria's mental health and wellbeing workforce strategy 2021–2024
 - South Australia Child Protection Systems Royal Commission
 - Coroner reports and recommendations

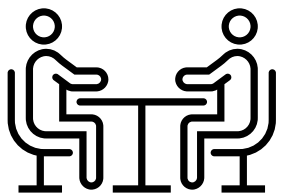
Report recommendations for social worker registration

REPORT	RECOMMENDATION
Scope of Practice Review (2024)	“Indicative priority” profession for strengthened regulation and options for government consideration.
Victoria Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2021 - 2024)	“The Victorian Government will advocate to Ahpra for a statutory registration scheme for social workers.”
Senate Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into Administration of Ahpra under the National Law (2022)	“The committee considers there is a substantial case for regulation of currently unregulated professions including social workers... and recommends the Ministerial Council consider whether these professions should be included in NRAS.” (Recommendation 3).
Select Committee on Statutory Child Protection and Care in South Australia (2017)	“Professional registration for social workers under AHPRA be introduced.” (Recommendation 14).
The life they deserve. Child protection systems Royal Commission South Australia (2016)	“The efforts of AASW to achieve national registration are encouraged and the Commission would support South Australia’s participation in a scheme.”
Children in state care Commission of Inquiry South Australia (2008)	“The introduction of a system of registration or accreditation for social workers, which requires ongoing professional development and training.” (Recommendation 14)

AASW advocacy to date



- **162 communications** advocating for registration of the social work profession



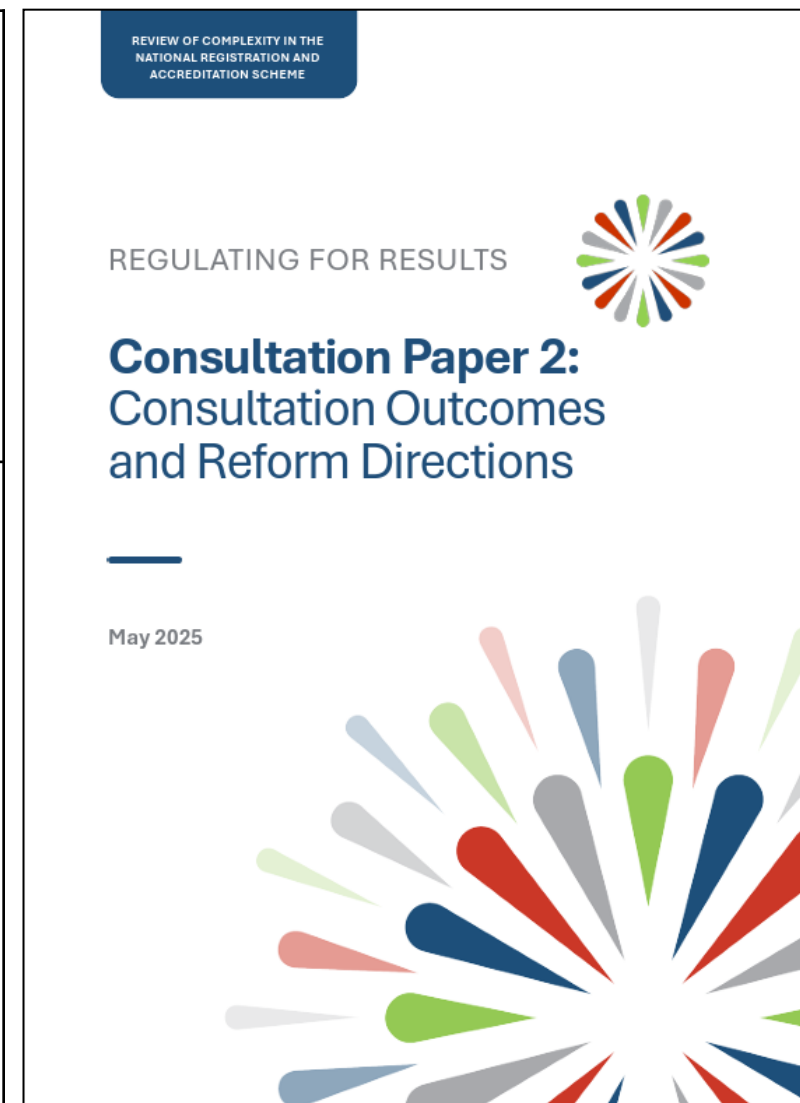
- **126 meetings with stakeholders**, including politicians, ministers, government departments, commissioners, coroners' officers, ombudsmen and allied health officials.

The “Complexity Review”

- Independent review of complexity in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme
- Sue Dawson appointed Independent Reviewer
- The review recommendations will:
 - consider whether the entry criteria for NRAS professions are still fit for purpose
 - consider how the NRAS can expand and grow to meet future needs.

Complexity Review Timelines

2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May 2024: Review established• September 2024: Release of Consultation Paper 1
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May 2025: Release of Consultation Paper 2• May-June 2025: Targeted consultation• July 2025: Final Report to Health Ministers



How to support advocacy

Cindy Smith

What can members do? How can members get involved?

Key challenges:

- There is a queue: audiologists, naturopaths, sonographers
- Making registration a political priority
- Focusing the conversation and educating decision-makers:
 - Focus on how safe and competent social work practice protects the public
 - Educate decision-makers on the role social workers play in health systems and improving health and wellbeing.

What can members do? How can members get involved?

- Wait for the outcome of the Complexity Review – due July 2025
- Watch out for opportunities for advocacy from the AASW in 2025
- Letters of support to key decision-makers
- Contact AASW (Social Policy and Advocacy) if you have connections to Ministers, advisors, department executives who may support advocacy

Remember:

- Focus on protecting the public from harm (e.g. risk of harm to the public)
- Focus on Health Ministers and Mental Health Ministers
- It is a long process
- With everyone's help we can get there!

Questions and Answers

Angela Scarfe

Next steps

- Stay tuned for further updates
- More information about registration can be found in the latest issue of Social Work Focus, on our website, MyAASW
- Please get in touch with the SPA team if you'd like further info - social.policy@aasw.asn.au



Thank you

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