

Brooke Kooymans: Candidate Statement – National President

I am nominating for the role of National President of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) because this is a pivotal moment for our profession. The AASW needs a leader who combines strong governance experience with authentic connection to practice. The AASW requires a President who can hit the ground running, providing continuity and clear direction. I bring these qualities.

As a current practising frontline social worker with more than 25 years' experience across health, disability and rehabilitation, I remain deeply connected to the realities our members face. I know the pressures of frontline practice in a complex and shifting landscape, and I bring this understanding to my role serving as a director. My professional life mirrors that of many of our members—I am not separate from them, but I stand with them.

I also bring significant governance experience. Since 2018, I have been elected to the AASW Board for 3 terms and currently serve as a Director. During this time, I have chaired the Ethics Committee, the People & Culture Committee, and the Finance & Risk Committee. These roles have strengthened my knowledge of the Association's governance, priorities, and challenges, while honing my ability to provide informed and consistent leadership. This corporate knowledge, combined with my fairness, integrity, and commitment to ethical practice, positions me to provide the stability the Association needs at this time.

For more than 20 years, I have been championing social work—advocating for the value of our profession and promoting its contribution wherever I can. I have shown this through my actions—whether through formal submissions, sector collaborations, working group participation or standing on my “soapbox” to highlight the vital role of social workers, I have consistently sought to ensure our profession is recognised and respected. This advocacy has shaped not only my practice but also my commitment to the AASW and the future of social work.

My academic and leadership experience further complement this. I hold a Bachelor and Master of Social Work and recently completed a PhD, where my research examined community-based practice frameworks in social work. I have also built and lead social work teams, develop student and graduate programs, and mentor early-career practitioners. These experiences reflect my belief that we must invest in the future of our profession while ensuring strong leadership today.

As National President, I will remain focused on the priorities that matter most to the profession:

- **Raising the profile of social work** – The community and sector must understand who social workers are and the value we bring. The AASW must continue to strengthen its visibility so our expertise is recognised and respected.
- **Pursuing registration** – National registration is critical to achieving parity with allied professions and safeguarding both practitioners and the communities we serve. It is essential that this remains a central focus for our association for the future of social work
- **Advancing our profession** – Social work is integral to health, disability, mental health, aged care, and child protection. The AASW must continue championing our role in these systems and ensuring we are visible in national policy and legislative frameworks.

Social work is a profession of advocacy and we must also advocate for the recognition our profession deserves. Throughout my career I have presented at national and international conferences, contributed to research, and engaged with government and sector working groups. These experiences demonstrate my commitment to lifting the voice of social work and ensuring the AASW leads with authority and credibility.

This is a critical time for our Association. The AASW has gained important traction in recent years, particularly in areas such as the NDIS, mental health, and registration. But the work is far from complete. We need a leader who is already experienced in the workings of the AASW and will not lose time getting up to speed. We cannot afford to lose momentum. We need consistent, experienced leadership to consolidate our gains and prepare for the challenges ahead.

With my combined experience as a practitioner, academic, leader, and extensive experience as a long-standing AASW Board Director, I am ready to provide the continuity and vision required. I ask for your support to serve as National President and to continue the important work of advancing, elevating, and protecting social work in Australia. Together, we can ensure that the AASW remains a dynamic, credible, and influential voice for our profession—one that both reflects and strengthens the work of every social worker in this country.