

My name is **Leonie Vela**, I am an Australian First Nations Mental Health Accredited Social Worker, mother, grandmother, and proud rural Queenslander. I bring to this role a broad professional background across government, non-government, and private practice, alongside proven governance experience as **President of the AASW Queensland Branch Management Committee (2022–2024)**.

Over the course of my career, I have worked in child protection in both Queensland and New South Wales, in Indigenous Affairs with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and as a Rural and Remote Local Area Coordinator with the NDIS. I have also worked in NGOs such as Mission Australia and Mercy Family Services. Currently, I run my own private practice, providing counselling, family support, supervised contact, and preparing Family Reports for the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia. My practice spans disability, mental health, education, housing and homelessness, alcohol and other drug issues, psychometric assessments, and counselling. I consider myself a **generalist social worker**, proud to embody the profession's breadth and adaptability.

I am seeking election to the National Board because I believe the **AASW must be both member-driven and well-governed**. Too often, members have told me they feel disconnected from decisions made nationally. When major commitments are made without consultation, members' voices are overlooked, and trust is undermined. Good governance requires not only strong financial stewardship and accountability, but also **genuine consultation and responsiveness to members**.

If elected, I will commit to:

- **Affordability and fairness:** No membership fee increases in 2026. I will advocate for pro-rata fees for part-time workers, tiered pricing for students and unwaged social workers, and expanded low-cost and complimentary CPD. Conferences must also be made more accessible to students and those on low incomes.
- **Financial transparency and accountability:** I will push for a comprehensive review of AASW's budget and expenditure to reduce operational costs, reinvest resources into Branches, and make public how funds are allocated — including litigation costs. Members deserve to know how their contributions are being managed.
- **Restoring Branch capacity:** Branch Management Committees must be empowered to directly engage with members, provide input into policy development, and advocate effectively at the state and territory level. Branches are the foundation of our Association's connection to members, and restoring their authority is essential.
- **Consultation before public commitments:** The AASW should never take a public position on a major issue without consulting its members. I will ensure that policy statements and advocacy positions reflect member voices and priorities.
- **Stronger advocacy and public voice:** I will work to strengthen the AASW's advocacy on core social work issues — child protection, aged care, homelessness, family violence, health, and justice — aligning our voice with the values of social justice and equity.
- **Truth, respect, and reconciliation:** As a First Nations woman, I will champion place-based initiatives that build respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising their contributions to the decolonisation of social work and to local communities.

- **Protecting professional identity:** I will defend member ownership of our Code of Ethics and Practice Standards, ensuring they remain the property of social workers and not transferred to external regulators.
- **Education and workforce sustainability:** I will restore collaboration with the Australian Council of Heads of Social Work Education on education standards, revert to the previous ASWEAS until full consultation occurs, and work with educators to safeguard the profession's knowledge base. I will also focus on workforce planning with industry leaders to improve workplace safety and address future demand for skilled human service professionals.
- **Governance accountability:** I will ensure that all AASW Board members and senior staff, including the CEO, are qualified social workers bound by the AASW Code of Ethics. Effective complaints and feedback mechanisms must exist at all levels to drive continuous improvement.

I bring to this role not only governance experience but also a commitment to **ethical stewardship, transparency, and inclusivity**. My leadership style is collaborative yet principled: I listen carefully, but I also act decisively to protect the interests of those I represent.

The AASW must be an organisation that members feel proud of — one that listens, responds, and leads with integrity. If elected, I will dedicate myself to strengthening governance, restoring transparency and accountability, and ensuring that the AASW is a sustainable, inclusive, and truly member-driven Association.

Contact

Email: [leonie@brenleealliedsupport.com.au](mailto:leonie@brenleealliedsupport.com.au)

MOB: 0434 962 465