

Transforming health professions regulation in Australia - a summary

Overview and background

The [*Transforming Health Professions Regulation in Australia Final Report*](#) explores how Australia can modernise the way health and social care professions are regulated under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS).

This is the Final Report of the [*Independent review of complexity in the NRAS*](#) by Sue Dawson (the “Complexity Review”).

The review explored how the NRAS can expand to grow and meet future needs. The aim of the review is to reduce complexity, make regulation more flexible and proportionate, and maintain the central focus on protecting the public.

The Complexity Review did not assess whether or not social work should be included in the NRAS. That is the role of Health Ministers. Its recommendations align with the strong case for social work to be included in the NRAS.

The review is clear that:

1. Health Ministers can decide that it is appropriate to regulate social work through NRAS as a health and social care profession.
2. A more contemporary understanding of risk of harm to the public is required within the NRAS. The AASW has already collected evidence of the high-risk nature of social work.
3. There is a mechanism for Health Ministers to act swiftly to regulate social workers.

1. Expanding the NRAS – health and social care professions

A key issue regarding the inclusion of social work in the NRAS, is whether professions that operate across both health and social care should be included in the National Scheme. This question is particularly relevant to social work, where there has been *“powerful ongoing advocacy for this, particularly from the social work profession”*.

The Review notes that current guidelines already allow for inclusion of professions working partly in health settings and partly in sectors such as education, justice, and community services.

However, it cautions that blanket expansion to all social care professions would add unnecessary complexity. Instead, decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis, guided by the main service context and the most appropriate regulatory body.

2. Towards a more responsive system to risks

The Review argues that public confidence in the system depends on regulation being proportionate—strong where risks are high, but not overly burdensome where risks are lower or already well-managed through other mechanisms.

The Review recommends when Health Ministers decide whether to regulate a profession, they should broaden their existing assessment of possible risk of harm to the public. This includes consideration of:

- the vulnerability of service users,
- the nature of the services provided, and
- any safeguards already in place.

3. Action 2.4 – a targeted pathway into NRAS for immediate risks

The Review proposes **Action 2.4**:

“a selective Expressions of Interest process to extend the National Scheme under the existing risk-based method. Jurisdictions would identify professions where available evidence suggests a current and significant risk to public health and safety, such as to warrant consideration of immediate inclusion in the Scheme.”

This would allow jurisdictions to identify professions where evidence shows a current and significant risk to public health and safety, warranting immediate consideration for inclusion in the Scheme.

Why this matters

In summary, the review is clear that:

1. Health Ministers can decide that it is appropriate to regulate social work through NRAS as a health and social care profession.
2. A more contemporary understanding of risk of harm to the public is required within the NRAS. The AASW has already collected evidence of the high-risk nature of social work.
3. There is a mechanism for Health Ministers to act swiftly to regulate social workers.

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The AASW has made a submission to Health Ministers for social work to be included in the NRAS, based on the existing criteria and process for assessing whether to regulate a profession.

In our submission to Health Ministers the AASW referenced the recommended actions of the *Transforming Health Professions Regulation in Australia* Final Report to further strengthen the case for Health Ministers to act now.