

Social Work Services & Scope of Practice Consultation Report

November 2024

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**Social Workers
Registration Board**
South Australia



Government
of South Australia

Acknowledgment of Country

The Social Workers Registration Board of South Australia (SWRB SA) acknowledges that the land we work on is the traditional lands of the Kaurna peoples and we pay our respects to elders, past and present. The SWRB SA acknowledges and respects that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Nations people of this country and recognises them as traditional owners and occupants of Australian land and waters. The SWRB SA acknowledges the violence of the colonial past and social work's part in this history and the impacts colonisation continues to have on First Nations people. The SWRB SA acknowledges the strong and enduring connection to land and culture for First Nations people.

Acknowledgements

The Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB) acknowledges the significant engagement from the sector to reach this consultation milestone for social worker registration in South Australia. Many people have been involved in information sessions across the state, both face to face and online, and we are grateful for their contributions and feedback to the consultation process, as individuals, organisations and lived experience participants.

The SWRB also acknowledges that many organisations engaged with their staff and/or membership over a short period and within busy work schedules, to provide us with comprehensive feedback about the social work scope of practice and social work services definitions.

The information gathered from individuals, organisations and lived experience participants has given us important perspective from which to plan our next steps and engage in our next phase of consultation. The SWRB look forward to continuing to work collaboratively to ensure that we uplift the profession of social work, protect the public and create a transparent, fair registration system.

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Contents

Introduction	4
Background	4
Methodology	4
Data Collection	4
Data Sample	6
Individual Survey Responses.....	6
Organisation Sample.....	11
Lived Experience Sample.....	14
Analysis	12
Findings	13
Question 1 (Part 1): Scope of Practice: What do social workers do?	13
Individual survey responses	13
Organisation responses.....	14
Question 1 (Part 2) Scope of Practice: What are social workers' responsibilities?	14
Individual responses	15
Organisation responses.....	16
Question 2: What are Social Work Services?.....	16
Individual responses	16
Organisation responses.....	17
Question 3: What are the functions and activities that can only be performed or managed by a registered social worker?	18
Individual responses	18
Organisation responses.....	19
Question 4: What roles do social workers undertake when performing social work services?	20
Individual responses	20
Organisation responses.....	21
Question 5: Where do social workers practice?.....	22
Individual responses	22
Organisation responses.....	23
Question 6: How do social workers practice?	24
Individual responses	24
Organisation responses.....	26
Comments Section	27
Lived Experience Networks	28
What is the role of a social worker?.....	28
What makes a good social worker?.....	29
Social work registration.....	30
Discussion	31
One general scope of practice.....	33
Social work services vs title.....	32
What Practice?	32
What competency?.....	33
Practice experience pathways	34
Next Steps	34
Appendix 1: Consultation Survey	36
Appendix 2: Companion Document	49

Introduction

This report describes the consultation process and shares the findings from the Social Work Services and Scope of Practice Consultation that was held between 9th August – 6th September 2024.

This report outlines the:

- **Background** context for the legislative purpose of the consultation
- **Methodology** for the consultation
- **Findings** from the consultation data
- **Discussion** and considerations regarding the data
- **Next steps** in the journey of registration of social workers

Background

On 9 December 2021, the Social Workers Registration Act 2021 (The Act) was passed in the South Australian Parliament, and the Social Workers Registration (Commencement) Amendment Bill 2023 was passed 16 November 2023 to provide that the principal Act will commence on 1 July 2025, unless commenced earlier by proclamation.

The Act uses the terms 'social work services' and 'scope of practice' but does not define either or leave these as terms to be defined by regulations made under the Act. Instead, the Social Workers Registration Board of South Australia (SWRB) is required to specify the meaning of the term 'social work services' by notice in the Gazette pursuant to section 19(1) of the Act and is separately required to 'describe the social work services that are performed by the social work profession in 1 or more scope of practice' pursuant to section 20(1).

Section 22 of the Act states that the SWRB must have consulted about its proposal for the contents (that is the definitions) with social workers, employers of social workers and organisations that will be affected by the proposal.

Methodology

The consultation process commenced on 6 August 2024 through to the 6 September 2024. In preparation for the consultation, and to situate the proposed definitions of 'social work services' and 'scope of practice', foundational reading and information regarding the process of the consultation was recommended and distributed via mailing list and through key organisations one week before it opened.

This information included:

- The Social Workers Registration Act 2021 (the Act)
- Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Code of Ethics (2020)
- AASW Practice Standards (2023)
- Companion Document Scope of Practice and Social Work Services (see Appendix 1)

These documents are key to fulfilling the obligations of the Act and informed the proposed definitions. An instructional video was also included to inform participants of the process for consultation. At this time, the SWRB contacted 3 Lived Experience Networks to arrange focus groups to be included in the consultation.

Data Collection

Data was collected from individuals, human service sector organisation submissions, and lived experience focus groups. The main data collection tool was an online, South Australian Government, YourSAy consultation instrument. The survey was constructed to reach as many people as possible in a limited time, and to focus the consultation on the key criteria to define 'social work services' and 'scope of practice.'

To ensure a diversity of key stakeholders had the opportunity to provide input, and to contextualise the data, the SWRB sought a range of demographic information, including information regarding job status, and length in human services sector and qualifications. (see Appendix 2)

To inform the definitions to be determined, the consultation sought input on six key areas that encompass social work:

1. The definition of Social Work Services
2. The Scope of Practice of social workers
3. Social workers' functions and activities
4. Social worker roles
5. Where social workers practice
6. How social workers practice

In each of the six key areas, a definition was proposed, and participants were given the opportunity to answer in one of three ways:

1. Yes, I agree.
2. Yes, I agree in principle but would like to suggest the following changes (and used a text box to express such changes).
3. No, I do not agree with this definition, and this is my reason why (and used a text box to express such reasons).

Organisations (human services, peak bodies, unions, universities etc) also had the opportunity to use the survey instrument, or to create a separate submission.

Consultations with Lived Experience Networks were arranged (DCP, DHS, & SA Health – CAHLN), and focus groups conducted either face to face or online. Focus group attendees were given an information sheet outlining the intent of the focus group, and an understanding of what would be asked of them. The following questions were circulated prior to the focus group:

1. What do you think is the role of a social worker?
2. Why do we need social workers?
3. What do you think social workers should do?
4. What makes a good quality social worker?
5. What makes a good quality social work service?
6. Do you think having a complaints process and disciplinary procedures for social workers will influence how people in the community engage with social workers and why?
7. How can we hear the community's voice about social work practice and conduct?

1. The YourSAy campaign was a closed sector campaign, in order to target those persons most affected by the Social Workers Registration Act. The survey instrument was designed in Survey Monkey and attached to the YourSAy campaign to give the SWRB more adaptable data collection tool.

Data Sample

This section reports the data sample from:

- Individual survey responses
- Organisation submissions and survey responses
- Lived experience focus groups.

Individual Survey Responses

472 individuals submitted responses to the survey. Most participants were female (83%), with 14% male, 2.3% preferring not to say, and n=3 participants identifying as gender diverse (471 answered this question).

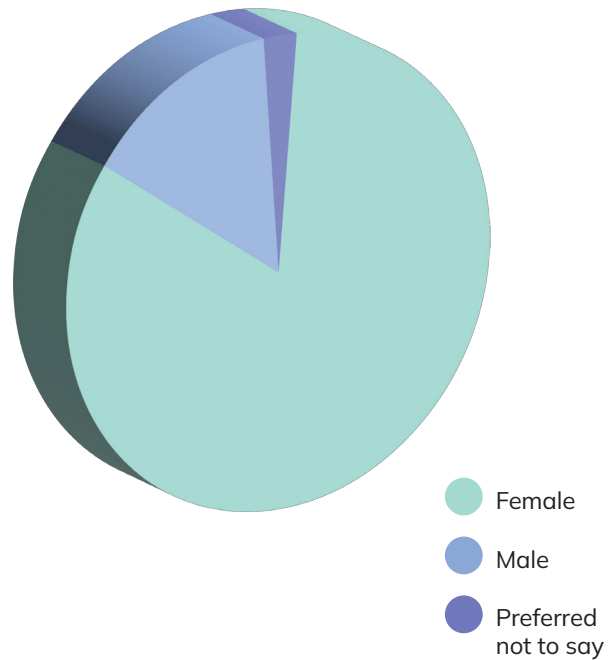


Table 1: Age of Participants

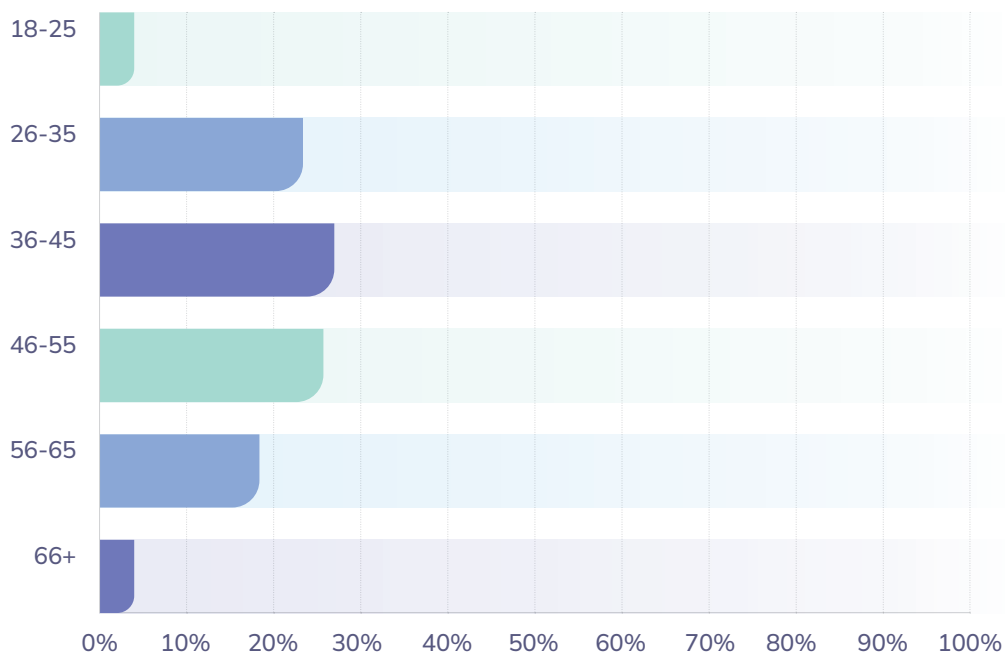
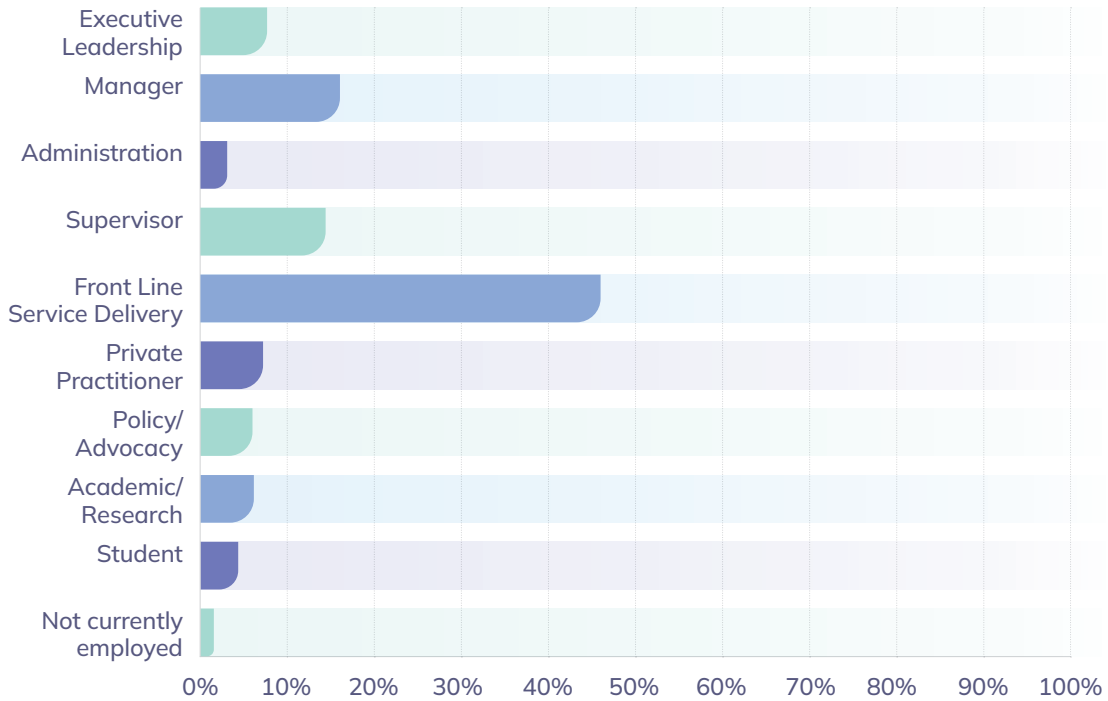


Table 1 displays the ages of participants representing a range of age groups, particularly across 26 years to 65 years (472 answered this question).

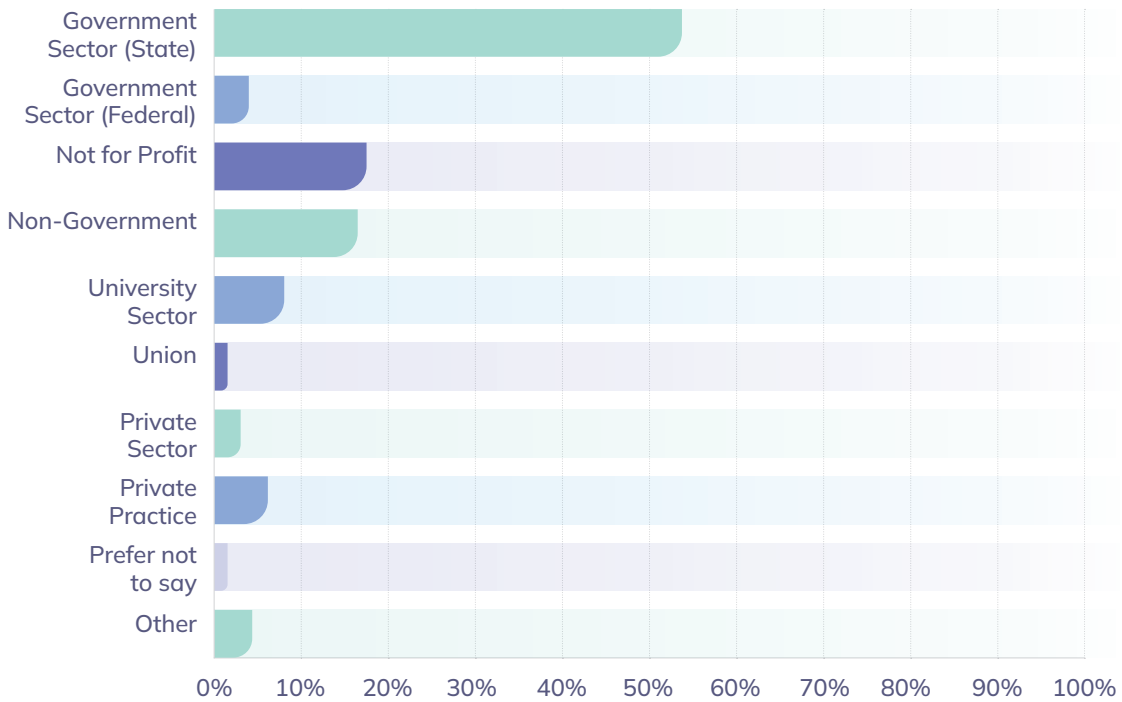
The majority of the participants were from Australian/Anglo cultural background, and the majority of the participants have English as their language spoken at home.

Table 2: Sector of Employment



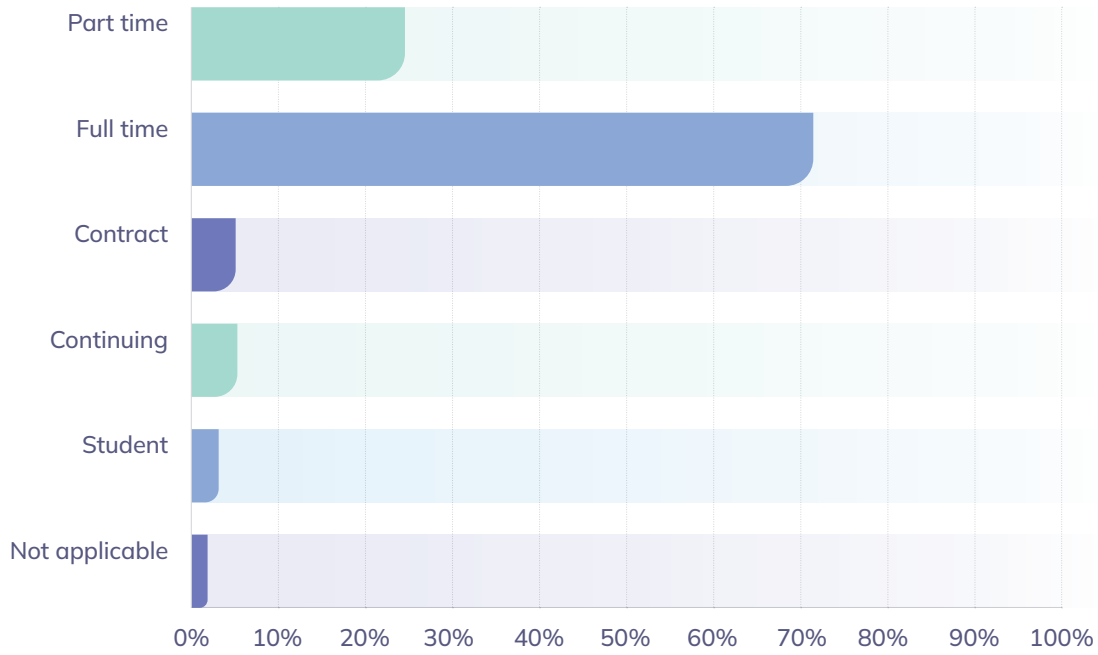
Nearly half of the participants were from the Government Sector, and 33% from not for profit and non-government sectors (471 answered this question).

Table 3: Sector Role



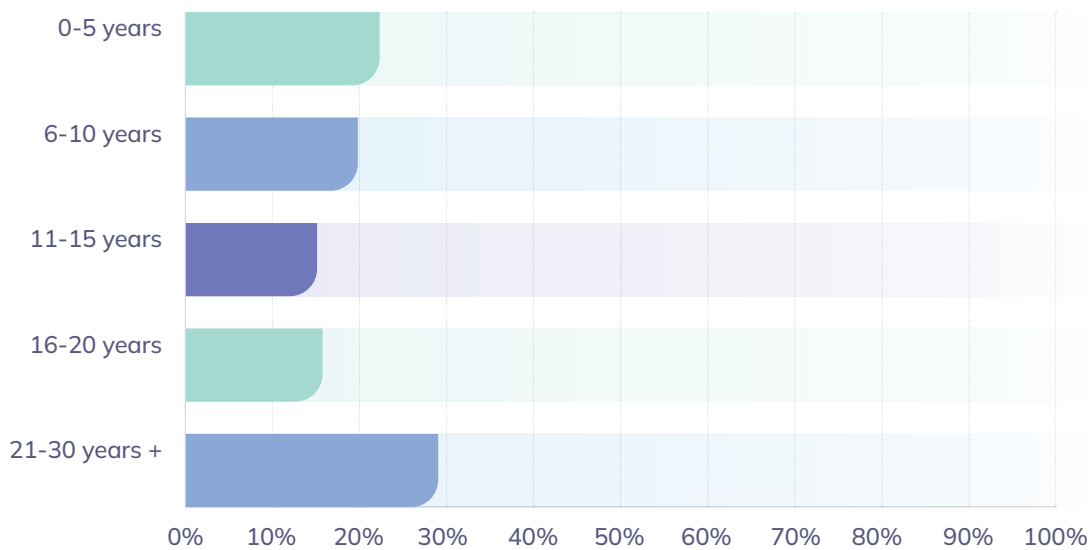
Half of the participants were employed in front line service delivery, with managers and supervisors comprising 16-18% of the sample. (437 answered this question).

Table 4: Employment type



Most participants were in full-time employment (71%), followed by 25% indicating part-time employment. The remaining sample indicated contract, continuing and student at approximately 5% (469 answered this question).

Table 5: Length of employment



There was an even distribution amongst the sample of the length of employment in the sector (469 answered this question).

Table 6: Tertiary qualification

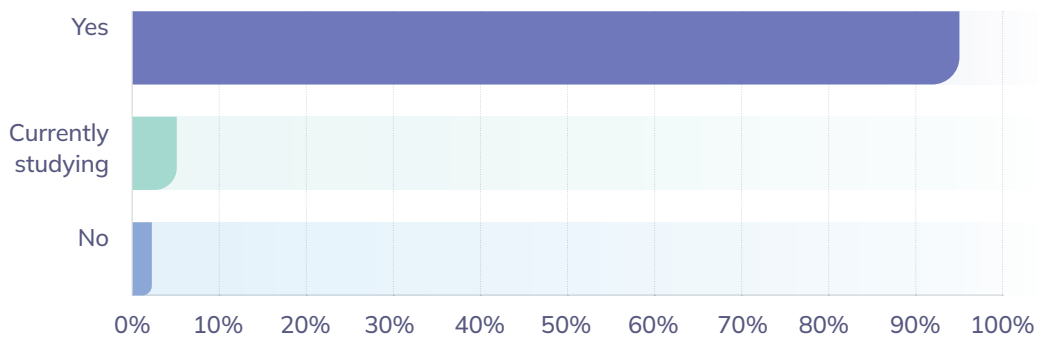


Table 6 shows that 95% of participants said they had a tertiary qualification, with 5% currently studying, and 2% with no qualification (470 answered this question).

28% said they were members of the Australian Association of Social Workers, and 72% said they were not (471 answered this question).



Table 7: Type of qualification

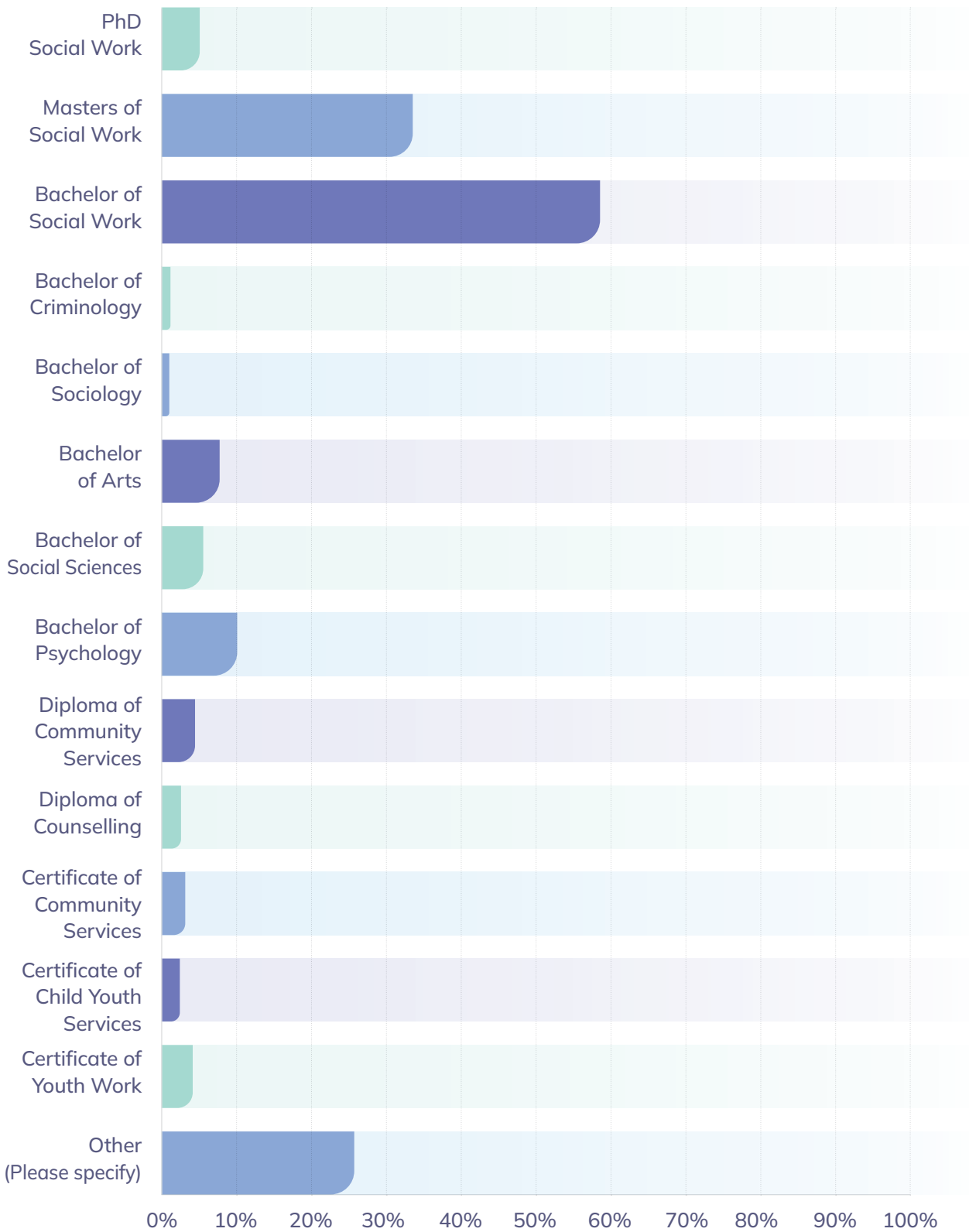


Table 7 shows the range of qualifications indicated by the participants (463 answered this question).

Organisation Sample

There were 19 organisation submissions in total (see table below) from a range of organisations including peak bodies, government organisations, non-government, and one from an interstate university. 10 organisations chose to submit via the YourSAy campaign using the survey instrument, and 10 organisations wrote a separate submission (one organisation submitted both).

Most of the submissions represented the views of the whole organisation (or those who consulted within the organisation), and some were written from an individual perspective (see table below). Some of the written submissions addressed the questions from the consultation directly, with others choosing to focus on the impact to their organisation and/or the sector more broadly

Table 8: Organistaion Submissions

Organisation	Submission Type	Individual or Organisation Submission
Anglicare	Written	Organisation
Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People	Survey	Individual
Child and Family Focus SA	Written/Survey	Member representative
Department for Child Protection	Survey	Organisation
Embolden	Written	Member representative
Guardian for Children and Young people	Written	Individual
Junction	Written	Organisation
Kornar Winmil Yunti (KWY)	Survey	Organisation
Lutheran Care	Written	Organisation
Public Service Association	Survey	Member representative
Queensland University of Technology	Written	Individual
Relationships Australia SA	Survey	Organisation
South Australian Council of Social Services	Survey	Member representative
Salvation Army	Written	Organisation
Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers SA Inc	Survey	Member representative
SA Health SWAG	Written	Advisory Group
UCW Bowden	Survey	Organisation
Uniting Communities	Written	Organisation
Uniting Country SA	Survey	Organisation

Lived Experience Sample

The SWRB conducted three focus groups with Lived Experience Networks, organised through Department of Human Services, the Department for Child Protection, and the SA Health (CAHLN).

Two of the groups were conducted face to face and one online. The participants gave approval for the session to be recorded and transcribed, and their de-identified information to be used in the report.

Organisation	Number of participants
Department of Human Services	7
Department for Child Protection	8
SA Health (CAHLN)	14
TOTAL	29 participants

Analysis

For the individual survey responses, frequency statistics were used to represent the spread of responses across the 6 key areas of scope of practice and social work services. In addition, thematic analysis was used to draw out the main suggestions for change, and concerns with the proposed definitions. At the end of the survey, people were given the opportunity to express in writing any opinion, thoughts, and advice they wanted to provide to the SWRB. This text data was also analysed thematically.

To gauge an overall sense of the organisation's feedback, each question from the survey was analysed against each organisation feedback. Thematic analysis was also conducted on the responses of 'Yes, in principle', and 'no, these are the reasons why'. Some representative quotes from the organisations are included for each of these sections as evidence. Some organisations chose to give more general feedback. In some cases, organisations agreed with the general sentiment of the question, but their comments appeared to have a contrary position or vice versa, so it is with caution that the 'yes' and 'no' figures were used.

The 'any other comments' section was also analysed thematically to gauge an understanding of issues and impacts that the organisation's collective raised about the proposed Scope of Practice and Social Work Services definition. As part of our consultation approach, every organisation received a separate tailored response to their specific submission from the SWRB, and an invitation to meet with the team.

The Lived Experience data was also thematically analysed against each of the set questions to provide understanding from a service user perspective. The Lived Experience groups will be provided with feedback about how their contribution helped shape discussions and thinking about the role of social workers and registration.

Findings

The findings are reported in two sections. The first section reports analysis of individual responses to the survey and organisation survey/submissions aligned to the 6 key areas (as reported in the data collection section above). The second section provides analysis of the lived experience feedback.

Participants were not required to answer all the questions to move through the survey and they were free to skip questions. As a result, not every individual answered all questions, hence the response rates are reported. Some participants marked both 'Yes', and 'Yes, I agree in principle' which has created a 1 – 3% margin of error.

Question 1 (Part 1): Scope of Practice: What do social workers do?

The Scope of Practice is the term used to refer to the range of responsibilities, functions, and activities of a social worker that are performed in a range of roles or ways and reflects documents such as the AASW Code of Ethics (2020) and the AASW Practice Standards (2023). It also is a requirement that the professional social worker recognise and work within the limits of their competence (this is their education and training). It was therefore proposed by the SWRB that the Scope of Practice for social work is to:

- Promote social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people.
- Adopt principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities.
- Engage people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

390 answered	89 skipped
73%	Yes, I agree
25%	Yes, I agree in principle, with suggestions
4%	No, I do not agree

Individual survey responses

Of the 25% that said 'Yes, I agree in principle', suggestions were made to align as closely as possible to the descriptors and terminology used by the AASW and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)². There was also discussion of what is a role, activity, and task, with some indicating the scope is too broad, others emphasising it needs to be broad.

Of the 4% that said, 'No, I do not agree', the reasons given were like the feedback given by those in the 'Yes, I agree in principle' group. In responses to this question, two themes were present. First, some raised the point that the scope of practice is not exclusive to social work and that other professions would claim the same or very similar. Second, competency as a term was also questioned and it was pointed out how important it is to operationalise competency in conjunction with scope of practice and social work services including functions, activities and tasks.

2. The definition proposed by the IFSW is: 'Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.'

Organisation responses

Thirteen of the organisations indicated that 'Yes, I agree' or 'Yes, I agree in principle' but with suggested amendments. They agreed that the definition needs to be broad to capture the diversity of social work practice and ensure it aligns with the AASW and international examples of the registration of social workers. The suggested amendments included:

- Consideration of how a statutory environment could be acknowledged.
- Responsibility of social workers to adopt culturally informed approaches and to support the cultural determinants of health.
- Acknowledgement of self-determination in the discussion of rights.
- Engage people and structures to address life challenges, support social relationships, and enhance wellbeing – as social work practice is situated, contextual and systems oriented, it is relational work – whether influencing relationships to one another, our environment, our experiences, and social circumstances, or oneself.

One organisation suggested consideration of more than one scope of practice, and named mental health, child protection, and health as examples of domains that could have their own scope of practice.

Some organisations considered how the SWRB might distinguish social work from other professions, as shown in the following observations:

The scope of practice described is not exclusive to social workers, and in no way detracts from the work undertaken by many other human service practitioners.

Our workforce is made up of a diverse range of human service qualifications, hence we do not want their work to be excluded. These other qualifications appropriately enable these staff to undertake their roles with the appropriate education and training to work in social service roles. We don't want the registration to be at expense of their qualifications and capabilities. These roles are not given a title of 'Social Worker', rather titles that consider other

appropriate qualifications (Certificate 4 and upwards) such as Community Services, Mental Health, Child, Youth and Family Intervention, Case Management, Children's Services, Counselling and Youth Work. We feel there needs to be recognition of this.

Another organisation stated that in principle, the generic aspirations of the scope of practice is important and worthy, but it does not tell the sector anything about the work and competencies required of social workers. Four organisations did not directly address the scope of practice definition.

Question 1 (Part 2) Scope of Practice: What are social workers' responsibilities?

The SWRB stated that a social worker's responsibility is to influence persistent issues of poverty, inequality, violence, discrimination, and ongoing failures of a social system by:

- Addressing wider impacts such as the historical impacts of colonisation, assimilation, institutional racism, exploitation, violence, neglect, oppression, and other social determinants of health;
- Actively challenging discriminatory practices, inequality and social injustice in organisations, systems, and wider society;
- Collaborating with individuals, children, groups, and communities to develop their own solutions to identified issues, and work to influence change at individual, child, family, community, government, and societal levels.

388 answered	91 skipped
73%	Yes, I agree
24%	Yes, I agree in principle, with suggestions
4%	No, I do not agree

Individual responses

The same themes arose from the 24% 'Yes, in principle', and 4% 'No' with tensions between some stating the responsibilities are too broad, and others stating they need to be this broad. Some suggested that more than one scope of practice could be identified and named including domestic violence, rape and sexual assault, statutory child protection, and mental health social work to counteract the 'unworkable catch all'. Similarly, these groups of participants pointed out that other professions also do this work.

Some participants provided helpful suggestions on wording of the responsibilities which the SWRB will look at closely, including:

- Some note that impacts of colonisation, assimilation and institutional racism, exploitation, violence, neglect, oppression, and other social determinants of health are not just historical but are current and ongoing.

- Some did not agree with the phrase 'collaborating with individuals, children, groups, and communities to develop their own solutions to identified issues' as this does not account for power imbalances, particularly in statutory contexts.
- Some wanted to write individuals then the following bracket (adults, young people, and children).

One participant raised the point that naming specific responsibilities may leave social workers open to professional sanction or legal liability for not taking on the named responsibilities, as they may have little or no control or ability to achieve these. They suggested that, at most, social workers may be able to influence but cannot be held responsible for these societal challenges.

Organisation responses

Twelve organisations indicated 'Yes, I agree' or 'Yes, I agree in principle' and suggested amendments:

- Recognition that it is not only a social worker's responsibility to influence these societal issues. Government, ministers, and agencies hold this responsibility, with other professions contributing responsibility.
- In acknowledgement towards the ongoing suffering of Aboriginal people due to the arrival of the British and the atrocities that followed, it is recommended the use of the term invasion, rather than colonisation.
- Use the following naming conventions of 'infants, children, and young people.' An alternate could be to include a further comment to working across the lifespan.
- A stronger focus on collective action, activism, and an intersectional approach that addresses how various forms of oppression intersect and affect communities differently.
- Emphasise accountability to marginalised communities, ensuring that their voices and leadership drive the development of solutions.
- To apply their knowledge and values in helping the client to develop solutions to identified issues and have a responsibility to influence.
- To operate within and across systems and this distinguishes social work from other individualised, 'siloed', professions: collaborate across service systems and professional disciplines to enhance service responses.

Five organisations did not address this question directly. Two organisations said no, with one indicating they did not want to endorse until they were clear on the impact on their workforce. Another organisation questioned whether the definition excluded other professions but also suggested another dot point be added –

The definition appears to exclude other professions from also working within these responsibilities. There should be explicit recognition that other registered professions (as well as suitability qualified, but unregistered workers) also accept these responsibilities.

Question 2: What are Social Work Services?

The SWRB proposed that Social Work Services means a service provided by a social worker performed in a general Scope of Practice for the purpose of engaging, assessing, analysing, formulating, intervening, evaluating, supporting, or protecting the wellbeing and safety of individuals, children, families, groups, or communities.

384 answered	95 skipped
72%	Yes, I agree
23%	Yes, I agree in principle, with suggestions
7%	No, I do not agree

Individual responses

The same themes arose from the 23% 'Yes, in principle' and 7% 'No' with tensions between the definition being too broad and the fact that such services are not exclusive to social work.

The following suggestions were given to be included in Social Work Services:

- Empowerment
- Therapeutic interventions
- Forensics
- Natural (ecological) environment
- Non-forward facing roles

Again, some participants provided suggestions on wording used in the Social Work Services definition including:

- Concern about the use of the term 'protecting' particularly in relation to First Nations peoples given their experiences of "protection".

Organisation responses

Eight organisations stated, 'Yes' or 'Yes, I agree in principle' and had suggestions for the definition proposed by the SWRB. Some organisations asked for the definition to be more concise, for example:

For the purpose of assessing and intervening with people experiencing challenges at an individual, family, group or community level.

Engaging people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

Six organisations did not directly address this question, whereas four organisations stated 'No' and provided the following reasons:

The definition appears to exclude other professions and so the definition needs to state services provided by a social worker, and only employed in a designated role called social worker.

It is too similar to services provided by other professions. The definition doesn't provide clarity about the actual services or nature of the services themselves.

Social Work Services should be defined as any services in a defined/designated social work role delivered by someone with a recognised social work degree eligible for registration under the Act.

The following definition was proposed by an organisation:

Social Work Services refer to a range of professional activities aimed at helping individuals, families, groups, and communities enhance their wellbeing and address social, emotional, and economic challenges. Social workers provide support, advocacy, and interventions designed to improve client's social functioning, access to resources and overall quality of life.

Question 3: What are the functions and activities that can only be performed or managed by a registered social worker?

The Act requires the Board to define the terms Social Work Services. Section 24 states that a person must not undertake social work services unless they are registered as a social worker under the Act and undertaking services within their scope of practice. Whatever conduct is captured within the definition that the Board determines will necessarily be conduct that only a registered social worker can perform because it constitutes a criminal offence to 'undertake social work services' whilst not registered under the Act pursuant to section 24(1). Hence the question of 'only' was proposed and a list of five points were outlined for consideration:

- Social Workers undertake evidence-informed bio-psychosocial assessments, analysis, and interventions – and must holistically consider the context of a person's situation and their environment.
- Social Workers must apply in-depth interpersonal, communication, and relational skills to lead, manage, and problem solve complex factors that impact on the safety and wellbeing of individuals, children, families, groups, and communities.
- Social Workers must identify and respond to trauma, danger, and harm factors using an evidence informed approach.
- Social Workers must lead, manage, and address challenges, difficulty, and vulnerability that are experienced in situations where circumstances are not easily changed, and in doing so enhance and strengthen people's ability and capacity in such circumstances.
- Social Workers must assist people experiencing crisis to endure and adapt to uncertainty, loss, and grief.

373 answered	106 skipped
59%	Yes, I agree
25%	Yes, I agree in principle, with suggestions
17%	No, I do not agree

Individual responses

Across the 25% 'Yes, in principle' and the 17% 'No' similar themes emerged around the following language: 'only be performed', the use of the word 'must', and the concept of 'enduring.'

Again, some thought the list was too specific and others thought it was too general. A small number stated that the five points did not reflect their working context and hence wanted work contexts to be explicitly recognised. This group, again, pointed out that many of the functions and activities described are also performed by other professions, para-professions, and lay persons and hence challenged the premise that only social workers can perform these functions and activities.

Some people raised concerns with the use of the word 'must', pointing out that contextual constraints, statute, regulation, policy, procedures, and contractual obligations may make fulfilling these requirements impossible. There were concerns that compelling social workers to do some of the activities listed may impact negatively on clients by decreasing their agency and could unintentionally imply social workers 'doing-to' rather than 'working with' service users. For example, a participant wrote:

The use of the word 'must' in some of these functions comes across very strong and prescriptive towards the clients and people we work with. It takes away that person's agency and control and makes me feel uncomfortable about my power as a social worker (which I'm very aware of already as I work in an involuntary client setting).

A small number of participants pointed out the wording of dot point 5: 'Social Workers must assist people experiencing crisis to endure and adapt to uncertainty, loss, and grief' raising concerns about the use of the term 'endure', pointing out that this word could be interpreted that social workers must not only assist enduring suffering but in fact they help clients adapt to their suffering. For example, a participant wrote:

Social workers must assist people' 'to endure' sounds like we want them to stay in that place and not get better/make positive change.

Those who said, 'yes' or 'no' to this question, the main reason given was they felt uncomfortable with the word 'only', pointing out that other professions also perform such functions and activities.

Organisation responses

Six organisations agreed with the listed functions and activities but with amendments including:

- Social workers must apply in-depth interpersonal skills to partner with clients to manage, and problem solve complex factors that impact on the wellbeing of individuals, families, groups, and communities.
- Social workers must use an evidence informed approach when identifying and responding to trauma, danger, and harm factors.
- Social workers enhance and strengthen people's ability and capacity by leading, managing, and addressing challenges, difficulty, and vulnerability that are experienced in situations where circumstances are not easily changed.
- Social workers assess for complex grief reactions and provide evidence-based counselling to address loss and grief.

The main objection shared by 13 organisations was the use of the term 'only' arguing that given the breadth of skills and knowledge across the sector, it is difficult to identify particular functions and activities only undertaken by a social worker.

Examples of the objections are listed:

At this stage, the sector operates on the basis that those functions and activities can either be performed by a social worker in line with their professional knowledge, skills and qualification; or can be performed by those with different professional knowledge, skills and qualifications.

The activities listed under 'social work only' do not appear to be exclusive to social work and represent many of the core activities of these other allied health professions. It seems unclear whether other professions will be able to continue to perform these activities, recognising that they fall under their scope of practice, or whether the social worker only activities are an attempt to delineate social work from these other professions.

Maintain the list of functions and activities but remove the restriction that these can 'only' be performed and managed by a registered social worker. If the Board maintains this restriction, we strongly recommend providing a list of excluded roles, such as Youth Workers, Assessment Workers, Community Coordinators, and Community Connector.

The Scope of Practice lists a range of functions and activities which are often undertaken by Social Workers; however, these functions and activities are not exclusive to this profession. The proposed functions and activities constituting to Social Worker permitted only will have a restrictive impact on those with lived experience (i.e. disabled workers) and those with cultural authority (i.e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People).

We agree that no one should use the title Social Worker unless they are registered under the Act however the term of 'only' in this question does not consider other appropriately qualified people who also undertake these activities and functions in human service roles. We hold a high degree of concern in relation to meeting workforce needs should registered Social Workers become the ONLY persons permitted to carry out the functions suggested.

Question 4: What roles do social workers undertake when performing social work services?

The SWRB proposed that social workers can undertake many roles at macro, meso, and micro levels (ie: societal, cultural, community, families and individuals) of practice including: one to one work, groupwork, system, service, and program design, therapy, counselling, consultancy, protection and safeguarding, community development, advising, research, education, supervision, facilitation, advocacy, crisis and case management, policy development, and leadership.

371 answered	106 skipped
72%	Yes, I agree
23%	Yes, I agree in principle, with suggestions
5%	No, I do not agree

Individual responses

Of those 23% that said 'Yes, in principle', they suggested adding a footnote or disclaimer stating this was not an exhaustive list because of the diversity of social work.

To illustrate the diversity and reach of the social work roles, the following list was suggested by participants:

- ◆ Project work
- ◆ Social and political activism
- ◆ Grant writing
- ◆ Report writing
- ◆ Community engagement
- ◆ Networking
- ◆ Evaluation
- ◆ Training development
- ◆ Management
- ◆ Crisis intervention
- ◆ Protection of natural (ecological) environment
- ◆ Educating
- ◆ Mitigating risk
- ◆ Advocating
- ◆ Lobbying
- ◆ Legislation advocacy
- ◆ Strategic planning
- ◆ Behavioural support interventions
- ◆ Screening and/or assessment
- ◆ Supervision
- ◆ Service navigation
- ◆ Referral
- ◆ Linkage
- ◆ Focused psychological strategies
- ◆ Evidence-based counselling

- ◆ Therapeutic counselling
- ◆ Support coordination (NDIS)
- ◆ Triage
- ◆ Delivering training
- ◆ Indigenous therapeutic approaches
- ◆ Spirituality
- ◆ Mental health intake
- ◆ Mental health assessment
- ◆ Risk assessment
- ◆ Supporter
- ◆ Caretaker
- ◆ Enabler
- ◆ Mediator
- ◆ Administrator
- ◆ Facilitator
- ◆ Delegator
- ◆ Organiser
- ◆ Listener
- ◆ Activist
- ◆ Networker
- ◆ Catalyst
- ◆ Humanitarian
- ◆ Academic
- ◆ Protester
- ◆ Relationship broker
- ◆ Non-forward facing roles

Those that said 'no', again mentioned other professions also perform these roles. For example, a participant said:

You do not have to be a qualified Social Worker to be able to perform these roles. Lived experience and other qualifications can be just as valid – if not more so.

Organisation responses

11 organisations said 'Yes, in principle' with amendments. The following suggestions were made:

- Registration should be about clinical practice, remove policy, leadership, research, education, facilitator, etc.
- Add risk management.
- A caveat such as 'including but not limited to' these roles, otherwise a comprehensive list will become unwieldy and unhelpful.
- With the possible exception of formal 'therapy' and 'counselling', these roles are generic across a range of occupations and practices.

Two organisations said 'no' and provided the following reasons:

Whilst the listed roles are representative of opportunities in which social workers may be employed, they are not exclusively held by this profession. As already noted, there are a range of disciplines and qualifications which offer direct pathways into the human services, hence this list of roles could just as readily be applied to those holding a Bachelor or Master level qualification in Social Sciences, Human Services, Psychological Science etc.

Can Financial Capability Workers (FCW) and Financial Counsellors (FC) be exempt?

The definition appears to exclude other professions from also working within these roles. The definition must clarify that this is relevant for social work, and that other professions (and suitably qualified but unregistered workers) also undertake work within these roles.

Question 5: Where do social workers practice?

The SWRB proposed that social workers can work in a variety of sectors and can be found in Federal and State government departments, non-government organisations, community services, in private practice, not-for profit, and for-profit organisations. Furthermore, social workers can work in a range of practice fields including but not limited to:

- Mental health, health, disability, aged care, and hospitals
- Child protection and child welfare
- Domestic and family violence, and sexual violence
- Family support
- LGBTQIA+
- Addiction, gambling, alcohol, and other drugs
- Housing and homelessness
- Community centres
- Income support
- Criminal justice systems
- Refugee and asylum seeker support
- Veterans' affairs
- Palliative care
- Rural and remote communities
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Schools, education, academia

370 answered	109 skipped
74%	Yes, I agree
24%	Yes, I agree in principle, with suggestions
5%	No, I do not agree

Individual responses

In this group of participants, it was raised by some that the list provided were not all fields but identities, for example LGBTQIA+ is an identity not a field of practice. A participant also pointed out the term 'addiction' was problematic for them as it is inferred to be negative and pathologizing. Some other options were asked to be included and are listed below, again showing the diversity of interpretation in where people work and practice.

The 5% that said 'no' provided two viewpoints. First, some said the list is constraining the profession rather than enabling responsive, innovative practice. For example, a participant said:

Social workers can work anywhere they want. The beauty of the profession and the Social Work degree is the flexibility it offers. Again, this is a basic list reflecting Social Work 101, rather than reflecting innovation and a future view of the Social Work profession. e.g. climate change, sustainability, digital inclusion.

A counter viewpoint was expressed that the list was perhaps too broad, allowing for 'scope creep', that is, professional identity as a social worker could be unintentionally diluted, not strengthened, raising concern about employment of those without qualifications.

- ◆ Private practice
- ◆ Training
- ◆ Immigration
- ◆ Victim support services
- ◆ Disaster relief locally or overseas.
- ◆ Courts/Coroner's Court
- ◆ Employment services
- ◆ Youth work
- ◆ Youth justice
- ◆ Law enforcement
- ◆ Trauma
- ◆ Attachment
- ◆ Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations
- ◆ Aboriginal Legal Services
- ◆ Sporting associations
- ◆ Defence
- ◆ Working with children and/or adolescents (not solely Child Protection)
- ◆ Public libraries
- ◆ Politics
- ◆ Unions
- ◆ Advocacy organisations
- ◆ Family Relationship Centres
- ◆ Multicultural services
- ◆ GP practices
- ◆ Charities
- ◆ Environmental protection
- ◆ Community development
- ◆ Foster care
- ◆ Refugee and asylum seekers
- ◆ Corporate settings
- ◆ Suicide prevention
- ◆ Quality management
- ◆ Auditing
- ◆ Forensics
- ◆ Green social work
- ◆ Faith-based social work

Organisation responses

10 organisations said 'Yes, I agree' but with the following amendments:

- 'Replace 'community centres' with neighbourhood development or community development.
- Remove 'rural and remote communities' as geographical areas are not practice fields.
- Remove Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations as it is not a practice field. It is a sector and should be listed up in the pre-amble alongside non-government and not-for profit organisations etc.
- Amend to LGBTQIA+ support services.
- Include youth work and 'at-risk youth', also rehabilitation and community and primary health care.
- Include emergency management, emergency and crisis relief.
- The practice fields should categorize mental health, disability, and aged care as distinct from general health to better represent the specialized skills and unique requirements of each industry.
- While the list recognizes ACCOs, it should also separately include ACCHOs for greater clarity.
- Put the statement 'including but not limited to.'

Seven organisations did not comment on this question, two organisations said no for the following reasons:

There is exclusivity over the areas – the definition should clarify it is relevant for social work and other professions do this too.

We believe including a statement that Social Workers bring a unique Social Work specific lens to every role in any domain may be more effective than generating a list. We believe that a list as presented risks becoming 'law' and does not leave space for new and innovative areas of practice.

Question 6: How do social workers practice?

The SWRB recognised that the Social Work Services and Scope of Practice that a social worker is permitted to perform must be based on appropriate education, training, ethics, value systems, and experience, that is, how social workers practice. The SWRB therefore proposed that social workers are skilled in the application of critical thinking, critical reflection, and self-awareness, and commit to a process of ongoing learning and development and professional accountability to deliver the best service to people and communities.

The SWRB stated that critical thinking means that social workers are skilled at seeking clarity through examination and evaluation of their own beliefs and actions. Critical thinking is not criticism but rather pursuing a questioning and evaluation mindset in decision making. Critical reflection comes from critical thinking because it enables a social worker to make decisions that can be scrutinised by others, clarify practice, and lead to better practice in the future. Critical thinking and reflection require self-awareness. Self-awareness is a mechanism of social work practice, requiring a high level of understanding about who we are and how we behave.

This is reflected in the AASW Code of Ethics 2020 and the Practice Standards 2023. However, the Act also states that social work is underpinned by:

- Theories of social work
- Social sciences
- Humanities
- Indigenous knowledges

The SWRB therefore proposed that engagement with social work theories, social sciences, humanities, and Indigenous knowledges, together with critical reflection and ongoing learning are core elements of how a social worker uses their professional judgement and decision making when providing Social Work Services in the Scope of Practice. These elements enable social workers to demonstrate identity and competency through their practice.

370 answered	109 skipped
74%	Yes, I agree
24%	Yes, I agree in principle, with suggestions
5%	No, I do not agree

Individual responses

There were overwhelming positive responses to the naming of critical thinking, critical reflection, and self-awareness, with responses affirming that these knowledges are nurtured explicitly by, and linked to, the importance of social work supervision.

Those who indicated 'yes, in principle' raised three concerns. First, some said that advanced knowledge and practice is not acknowledged and wondered if there was opportunity for more than 1 scope of practice, that is, to acknowledge those that are advanced or specialised in their careers as social workers and the knowledge and experience that was required to reach this advanced level of practice.

Secondly, some questioned the quality of higher education social work qualifications, and the perceived inability for universities to teach 'real-life' and 'realistic practice.' Some questioned the intake of students into social work programs without a social science or psychology background, particularly the Master of Social Work, and raised perceived concerns of universities not preparing students for field education placement, not failing students, and therefore allowing students to graduate who are not ready to work with vulnerable people.

A third point of concern raised was about the criteria for the practice experience pathway, emphasising the importance of acquiring knowledge and scholarship through study. For example, a participant wrote:

That all people being considered for registration based on years of experience in a field, cannot be automatically granted entry, they MUST be required to acquire social work knowledge through study. Letting people with years of experience without any educational requirements is a social injustice to those of

us who have spent time, money, devotion and application to achieve the acknowledgement as a social worker. Everyone who is considered MUST prove their ability and intent to adhere to accepted standards through completion of a minimum set of educational tasks . . . The Board needs to develop a standardised application and testing process that ensures all who gain accreditation demonstrate an acceptable level of standardised knowledge. This equals opportunity and provides a more just accreditation system.

Of the 5% that said 'no', the main reason for disagreement (like those that said 'yes, in principle') included concern regarding the content and quality of higher education social work qualifications, with an overemphasis on 'theory' over practical application in the qualifications. One participant said it was important to point out that social work is a political practice and suggested inclusion of social policy. For example:

Social policy should be mentioned as a critical underpinning field of knowledge for social work practice, within the social sciences. Social work is a political practice – because it is tied to collective, societal wellbeing, and social justice in the context of situated experience, in ways that psychology, and medical practice (for example) are not.

Organisation responses

12 organisations agreed with the listed social work knowledge and suggested the following amendments:

- Social sciences offer social workers knowledge in areas including social behaviour, society's institutions and structures, its histories, and its people. 'Human Condition' is missing in Humanities ... could amend to Humanities offer social workers knowledge about the human condition, society, culture, language, history, and philosophy.
- Lived experience should also contribute as a core body of knowledge. Social workers should be required to elevate the voices of lived experience to their individual practice and to broader awareness to stimulate social change.



- Social Workers use knowledge from other areas including psychological based theories and knowledge, and it is much broader than the term ‘social sciences.’
- Acknowledging that all social workers bring their own diverse cultural knowledge to their practice, and that ‘non-Indigenous social workers’ are not a homogenous category.
- We believe that supervision should be embedded into the introductory paragraph of this section to read: Social Workers are skilled in the application of critical thinking, critical reflection, and self-awareness, and commit to a process of ongoing learning, supervision, development and professional accountability to deliver the best service to people and communities.

The representation of Indigenous knowledges was welcomed but one organisation asked for the following correction:

When ‘the Act’ and the AASW state that Social Work is underpinned by Indigenous knowledges; they are purporting that the Social Work profession has colonised Indigenous knowledges. This is not true. However, I support the explanatory narrative given. This legislation and the AASW need to do serious amendments so that it is about Social Work practice and academic discipline ENGAGING with Indigenous knowledges.

We recommend naming and defining culturally responsive practice, as well as additional clarification and instruction around aligning clinical and cultural practices, to ensure Social Workers are not picking one over the other when independently deemed appropriate or convenient. Clinical and cultural practices need to be used concurrently for effective service delivery when working with clients. Will you be referencing Indigenous knowledge, encompasses and informs Indigenous social work theory, approaches and practice?

Is there going to be a policy position or framework developed by the social work board to set the standard of collaboration and consultation with Indigenous people and governance structures (please define Indigenous governance structure?).

Six organisations did not comment on this question, and one gave the following reason:

We don’t believe that the broad headings of Social Sciences and Humanities adequately cover the breadth of theories that cover/ inform our practice and should specifically reference foundations such as Psychology. We think that the statement that Social Workers apply critical thinking is too broad and doesn’t not reflect the skill set around analysis of power, relations and clinical reasoning.

Comments Section

We invited people to contribute any thoughts, concerns, opinions about social work registration, and provided an open-ended text box at the end of the survey. 134 people took the opportunity to write a response, and four themes emerged from these written pieces.

- Firstly, many took the opportunity to reiterate how important they believe registration of social work is, and how they thought registration is the lever required to raise the standing of the profession, quality of education, and provide protections for social workers and the public.
- Secondly, some participants expressed concern and raised whether it is possible to define social work services that only a social worker can perform, recognising that many professions in the human service sector work within the scope of practice put forward. This raised a key question about how to protect social work could be balanced with respecting the diversity of other roles within the sector.
- A third theme related to the impact of social work registration on the current workforce, including concerns about experienced workers without a social work degree losing their positions. Some commented on the opportunity of the practice experience pathway options but also questioned the cost and time to undertake such an option. Others commented on the practice experience pathway undermining or devaluing the social work qualification and felt uncomfortable with the practice experience pathway allowing the use of the title.
- Finally, a small group of participants acknowledged the importance of generalist and specialist social work, and therefore developing advanced or specialist scopes of practice in addition to one general scope of practice.

The organisations raised additional themes for the SWRB to consider including:

- Wanting a staged approach to registration, allowing time to understand and organise.
- Only want registration for direct practice.
- Concern about the cost of registration for them and their staff.
- Wanting an industry support package.
- The definitions being too broad and not unique to social work.
- Concerns regarding the criminal history checks and possible exclusion from registration.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people not wanting to use the title social worker.
- Consideration of lived experience knowledge.
- Clarification of roles such as case manager, social worker, youth worker etc.

Lived Experience Networks

29 people participated in the focus groups held across DCP, DHS, and CALHN, which provided rich insight into the questions of what the role of a social worker is, what makes a good social worker and thoughts regarding the pending registration of social workers. There was similarity in responses across the three focus groups.

What is the role of a social worker?

When asked to describe the role of a social worker, that is, what do they do, the participants identified that social workers work with vulnerable communities. The main themes that arose from the group were advocacy and navigating the human services sector to help families and individuals. Participants stated social workers need to be a voice for people who find systems overwhelming and difficult to navigate. One participant said that social workers should:

Understand the systems that they're working in to be able to navigate, to get to solutions. The social worker needs to kind of understand you, and also that system in which we're all kind of living.

The groups understood that social workers generally provide support to people, and discussed:

- The role of advocate
- Providing and/or connecting people to resources
- Helping people to navigate challenges such as poverty, mental health, family dynamics and changes in their lives.
- Facilitating access to services.
- Promote social justice and,
- Empower people to work toward their goals.

Participants recognised that social workers also collaborate with other professionals and organisations for a holistic and comprehensive approach to care and support. Overall, social workers were seen to enhance individual wellbeing and foster healthier communities. Here are some of the comments related to social workers supporting people:

Because there's system inequalities that exist and there's vulnerable populations that don't have fair and equitable access to rights.

Advocate. Assessment of needs and support. Empowerment, Collaborate, Crisis Intervention, Education and Community Engagement.

To help and assist people navigate process and systems that they have trouble with due to their health or mental wellbeing. And making sure process are in place to keep people safe.

This theme aligns with the proposed definitions of Social Work Services and Scope of Practice because the groups identified that social workers are needed to help address complex social issues because people cannot necessarily do this on their own. They support vulnerable populations who do not necessarily have fair and equitable access to their rights, and participants stated we need social workers to challenge systemic inequalities which helps to create a more compassionate and equitable society.

Another theme that arose during discussions of what does a social worker do, was the concept of power. Groups recognised and described the high level of power a social worker holds, with one participant saying that social workers 'need to ethically represent information... because there's a lot of power in that information.'

With such power, participants also identified that social workers need high levels of skill and knowledge to be able to work amongst trauma, complexity, and advocacy. They described, first, the power social workers held, but also, second, for social workers to understand dynamics of power particularly in domestic and family violence, child protection and other trauma related experiences such as:

There is power imbalance in removal of children and assessment, and you need greater skill, accuracy and professionalism for people doing this role.

You need a good skill set around trauma, and social workers need to understand the dynamics of power in domestic violence with the life of control, including the trauma to a child of being removed from a family.

Across all focus groups, participants emphasised the need for social workers to be highly skilled and trained so they could liaise with other professions, navigate complex systems, and understand and respond to complexity and trauma. Furthermore, they identified the need to be educated and because the role of social worker is 'demanding' that social workers need 'a lot of skill and sector knowledge' and to 'continue to learn to remain current.'

What makes a good social worker?

A dominant theme that emerged from the question regarding what makes a 'good' social worker was having a high level of interpersonal communication and relational skills. The groups used words and phrases such as: empathy, high level communication skills, being trauma informed, problem solving skills, and being 'skilled in having a non-biased approach.' They thought it was important for a social worker to have a very nuanced understanding of power, coercion, and control, and bring this to all complex issues. Values were also named by the participants in their descriptions of 'good' social workers including phrases 'continual learners' and 'honesty and integrity' were also discussed.

The feedback focused on the skill of a social worker, and there was understanding that they need to have exceptionally good communication skills because of the very difficult conversations that are needed with people at times. They continually emphasised that social workers need to maintain strong relationships, build trust, and communicate in a way that feels natural with people who they may need to discuss challenging issues with, and who are experiencing very challenging circumstances.

A trauma informed lens or trauma responsive practice was also seen as important to do the job effectively, and many expressed social workers need to have a good understanding of themselves and their own biases. These points align closely with the proposed scope of practice and social work services definitions.

Accuracy was another theme that arose in terms of describing a 'good' social worker and that social workers need to understand the law, and

the importance of working from a social justice perspective. The groups repeatedly came back to the need for a good social worker to be an accurate record keeper, and to understand that the records have a legacy for many years into the future. The groups recognised that this could have significant impacts shaping views on their parenting, and possible removal of children.

Accurate record. Attention to detail.

Dependability – whether it relates to writing up consistent notes or providing a response or going back and following up a response or detail.

The groups identified the importance of a degree level qualification, explaining that social workers are required to have advanced interpersonal skills as they work in areas of high complexity. Continuing professional development was also recognised as important because people need to stay skilled throughout their career.

There was discussion about social workers needing to take on a great deal of responsibility because people rely on the assistance that they say they will provide. There was concern raised that there were not enough social workers to meet the demand in a health or hospital settings, waiting lists were long, and it was difficult to access the services they needed.

The group identified that it is important for social workers to intervene at an individual level, but they also to address issues at a systemic and structural level. The groups recognised that the skills of social workers need to be at a very high level, and they need to know how to adapt to the multiple roles they perform in multiple systems and be:

Client centred, [be] skilled professionals, [provide] accessible holistic support with good communication skills. Services that adopt a collaborative approach and work through systemic advocacy as well as individual advocacy.

Have advanced skills because they have extremely difficult conversations with people who are experiencing significant life events that can cause lifelong trauma.

Social work registration

Accountability was a major theme in the focus groups, when the topic of social work registration was raised. The groups generally thought that having a complaints and disciplinary process/procedure was important, and they felt that it would give them 'peace of mind' that a social worker was 'board certified' noting that registration will:

Hold them accountable as well, like if they do the wrong thing, obviously they'll have a process that they need to go through to then be able to stay in their profession.

The groups also identified that there will be a level of 'choice and control' of who is providing the services to them, and knowing if they are a social worker or not, or whether they have the qualifications. They also said that social workers hold them as clients to a high level of account so this will mean 'social workers will also be held to a very high standard.'

The groups identified that a complaints system will give consumers confidence because professionals will be accountable for what they do as well as what they don't do. It was seen as a good check and balance for all professionals. The following quotes show why the groups agreed with the registration of social workers:

Currently there is an assumption that people calling themselves social workers will have a high degree of education, ethical practice, and skill set. That is not always the case, especially in the community. People with no training who have social connection with community-based clients have been called social workers and very likely cannot provide the quality of care that family expect.

I just find that absolutely baffling that someone can go and work at one hospital, have a complaint made against them, and that doesn't travel with them. So absolutely having a complaints and disciplinary process absolutely needs to come into play.

The group also identified that without a 'well-defined description of what a social worker is and isn't where feedback or complaints can be measured against' the complaints system will be limited. The group expressed overall surprise that social workers were not registered, and can be summed up by one person who expressed this strongly:

People in crisis are extra vulnerable to any incorrect advice. [!] would expect a system already in place.

Discussion

The anticipation of the registration of social workers in Australia has been discussed and debated for decades. South Australia has provided a significant opportunity to establish the first social work regulator, with the Social Workers Registration Act 2021 (the Act) coming into effect on the 1 July 2025. The consultation held by the SWRB has provided a moment in time to discuss, as a sector, the very important questions of ‘what are social work services and what is a social work scope of practice?’

Overall, the consultation confirmed that the sector, and those with lived experience, support the registration of social work, and a significant majority generally agreed with the proposed definitions of social work services and scope of practice. Most suggestions of alternate wording and phrases were helpful and will be adopted in the final draft.³

Throughout the survey responses and organisation submissions there was similarity in terms of the concerns raised with defining social work services and scope of practice. The findings from the consultation indicated a tension amongst responses in the definitions of social work services and scope of practice. Some proposed that the definition is too broad whereas others welcomed the broad nature of the definition. This discussion responds to such concerns.⁴

One general scope of practice

Some respondents suggested establishing more than one scope of practice. For example, having knowledge, skills, and experience to practice in a more focused and specialised way, such as having a scope of practice in child protection, mental health, research, and so on, and delineating between new graduates, general, and advanced social work.

The SWRB proposes that at this stage, one general scope of practice is appropriate because it serves as a foundational element for maintaining high standards and protecting both professionals and the public. One general scope of practice

establishes a baseline for professional standards and ethics for social workers, making it easier to hold practitioners accountable for their actions. Furthermore, it informs educational institutions about the necessary competencies required for new practitioners, helping to align curricula with the needs of the profession. Having more than one scope of practice and delineating between levels of practice is a sophistication that we can all strive for in the future, once registration is established, commenced, and reviewed.⁵

The additional suggested roles, activities, and fields of practice from participants also demonstrated a desire to develop a broad and inclusive professional identity for social work. One general scope of practice allows the profession to adapt to various situations, which is important in this current environment as regulation is established for social work for the first time in Australia.

3. The draft definitions will be finalised by the SWRB but then written in the format of regulations, hence will be crafted by appropriate lawyers.

4. The staff of the SWRB responded to each individual organisation submission in writing and arranged a follow up meeting to discuss individual concerns.

5. The Act requires review after 3 years from commencement.

Social work services vs title

Respondents also largely agreed with the definition of social work services, with some saying it needed to be general, where others offered a more concise definition. Yet, at the same time, many respondents raised concerns about the word 'only', that is, the SWRB-proposed functions and activities that only a social worker can undertake to fulfill section 24 of the legislation.

Under the legislation, the SWRB is responsible for defining the meaning of the term 'social work services.' Whatever conduct is captured within the definition that the SWRB determines, will necessarily be conduct that 'only' a registered social worker can perform because it constitutes a criminal offence to 'undertake social work services' whilst not registered under the Act pursuant to section 24(1). In short, the legislation requires the SWRB to be clear about what social work services are, and who can undertake them, hence the SWRB 'tested' five key statements regarding assessment, complexity, trauma, vulnerability, and crisis – which aligned with AASW, and other social work regulators in terms of what they state social workers do.

The consultation showed that there is tension in determining how wide the term social work services is to be defined, and the possibility of a very wide range of person will be captured and be required to be registered. Similarly, respondents pointed out that other professions are like social work, doing similar functions and activities. To maintain the integrity of the legislation, and given the likely broad nature of the any definition of 'social work services', the SWRB will most likely need to turn its mind to, expressly excluding particular types of services and/or categories of persons from the definition of social work services. Some respondents suggested in the survey to also exclude particular categories of persons.

Some respondents suggested that the use of the title social worker in job positions and descriptions was perhaps the way to provide clarity on who needs to register as a social worker, that is, only those using the title need to register. This suggestion was debated in the Report of the Joint Committee on the Social Workers Registration Bill 2018.

The AASW and members of parliament argued that title protection alone does not protect the public, as it does not have regard to the actual scope of the person's work.

Concerns were raised that individuals and employers of social workers would be able to circumvent registration by simply changing an employee's job title to avoid them having to register as a social worker. Defining social work services in a scope of practice captures the full range of roles, responsibilities, functions, and tasks that those working within social work are allowed to perform taking into account their qualifications, experience and competence. It maintains integrity and alignment with the purpose of the Act.

What practice?

Some respondents also raised the question regarding those practicing in social work services without the qualification of social work, that is, people have been employed across the human service sector, performing social work services, without a qualification and/or with a bachelor's level qualification in human services, social sciences, psychological sciences, criminology, and so on, and may refer to themselves as social workers or another title such as case manager etc. Some respondents queried if those employed with lived experience knowledge would be required to register, because they may be performing social work services.

The Report of the Joint Committee on the Social Workers Registration Bill 2018 also debated the concern about qualifications, concluding that the intent of the Act is unequivocal in its position that only those with formal tertiary social work qualifications or with sufficient practical experience in practising social work should be registered to perform social work services performed in the scope of practice. It is for these reasons that a practice experience pathway was also included in the Act.

The SWRB is responsible for defining what constitutes sufficient practical experience in practising social work. This is discussed below. The SWRB also recognises the importance of lived experience; however, to be performing social work services, the person requires registration. The sector will need to be clear on the roles and responsibilities of employing

those with lived experience knowledge, ensuring clarity that they are using their experiences to support others, and that this does not encroach into social work service unless the person is registered.

Some respondents questioned if registration could and/or should only be about 'direct' or 'clinical' practice, and hence remove 'indirect' practice such as policy, education, and research from the definitions and hence a requirement of registration. This does not align with other international regulators of social work and does not consider the broad multifaceted, complex nature of social work and the power of decisions made by social workers that impact on the public. Furthermore, it does not align with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency, who define practice as:

Any role, whether remunerated or not, in which the individual uses their skills and knowledge as a practitioner in their regulated health profession. Practice is not restricted to the provision of direct clinical care. It also includes using professional knowledge in a direct non-clinical relationship with patients or clients, working in management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory or policy development roles and any other roles that impact on safe, effective delivery of health services in the health profession.

Some respondents also pointed out that other professions also have similar scopes of practice, such as aspects of nursing, psychology, occupational therapy and so on. It is acceptable for professions to have similar scopes of practice, especially in the human services. For example, The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for the health profession acknowledges that health and social care professionals work across a range of different settings, with teams that draw from many professions, and are often dependent upon one another to deliver comprehensive care. But while they may share responsibilities the specifics of their training and education can differ. Social work has not been regulated like other professions, and so to be regulated a definition of social work services and scope of practice is required – so then education and training standards can be set for accreditation and competency.

What competency?

Many respondents questioned the quality of higher education social work qualifications. The SWRB recognises this as a legitimate concern because registered social workers will be held to certain standards of competency and conduct. Furthermore, the relationship between social work services performed in a scope of practice and competency is crucial in ensuring effective and safe service delivery.

Regulation influences quality assurance through accreditation of social work educational programs, and continuous professional development is required for registration. Aligning with AHPRA, the SWRB now decides to approve, refuse to approve, or request review of new or amended accreditation standards. The SWRB prescribes qualifications which can lead to registration as a social worker. This means that the SWRB will naturally have a role to play in confirmation that the qualifications it prescribes are of an appropriate standard.

Finally, it is worth reiterating that those with lived experience voiced high expectations of social workers. They spoke to the themes reflected in the proposed definitions of social work services performed in a scope practice, including social justice, challenging power relations and inequalities, advocacy, working in complexity with vulnerable peoples, needing to have high quality interpersonal skills, and being ethical and non-judgemental. They also named the importance of education and training to be a qualified social worker, identifying accountability as essential when working with vulnerable groups of people, and expressed dismay that social workers were not currently registered.

Practice experience pathways

The SWRB did not pose a question in the consultation regarding practice experience pathways to registration. However, some participants used the opportunity in the survey responses to raise their concerns and opinions regarding this option. A pathway to registration because of sufficient practical experience practising social work is required in the Act. Some participants were curious about the pathway, but raised concern regarding the time, cost, and support of their employer to enable this option. For example, one participant wrote:

An experience pathway for obtaining a social work qualification would help to address the issue of individuals with vast experience in a social work capacity being eligible of registration.

Some participants pointed out the great skill, particularly cultural knowledge and leadership that may not be acknowledged by the pathway and industry and encouraged very careful thought to enable groups of people and to not disadvantage them.

Feedback was received about protecting the value of social work degrees and fear of it being devalued if those with generic qualifications or no qualifications are recognised within this regulatory framework. For example, a participant wrote:

Anyone can call themselves a social worker, which invalidates the purpose, time, expense, achievement, and knowledge of getting a social work qualification from university.

The *Report of the Joint Committee on the Social Workers Registration Bill 2018* also debated the practice experience pathway option, noting at the time there were divergent views whether it should be offered or not. The Act does include it, allowing those who are already employed in the public sector as social workers, without the requisite qualifications, to be assessed to demonstrate they are appropriately skilled and competent for registration. The pathway does not provide them with the qualification, only the legal use of the title of social worker for registration purposes.

Next Steps

The SWRB is committed to working collaboratively with the sector and the government to ensure that the registration approach meets the objects of the Act. South Australia is the first jurisdiction to legislate for the registration of social workers and the SWRB is committed to work in a consultative, considered and staged manner.

Following consideration of the feedback and , the SWRB now proposes to:

1. Amend the definitions of social work services and the scope of practice.
2. In consultation with the sector, consider types of services and/or categories of persons that should be expressly excluded from the definition of social work services.
3. Finalise criteria for those seeking a practice experience pathway and explore recognition of prior learning and enrolment into a social work qualification for those wanting to gain the qualification. The SWRB will provide more information regarding these options in due course and will explore provisional registration for such persons while they undertake such options, allowing a possible four to five years to complete.
4. Implement registration from 1 July 2025 to begin registering people working in social work services.



Thank you!

The SWRB would sincerely like to thank individuals and organisations who have participated in this consultation process and who have provided us with honest and thoughtful feedback to consider. We will continue to build relationships with the sector through collaboration and consultation, as we work towards the milestone of registering social workers in South Australia.

Appendix 1: Consultation Survey

Scope of Practice and Social Work Services Consultation Survey

About You

This section asks questions about you, your background, work, and education. Information gathered for this survey will be used as a snapshot of the social work profession in South Australia, and to be sure we have consulted widely. We will not publish any of your responses with any identifying information, however quotes or summaries may be used to communicate what we have learned.

You do not have to answer any, or all of these questions if you don't want to.

Please let us know your gender

- Female
- Male
- Gender Diverse
- Prefer not to say

Please let us know your age

- 18 - 25
- 26- 35
- 36 - 45
- 46 - 55
- 56- 65
- 66+

Please let us know your cultural background

What is the main language spoken at home other than English

Please let us know the sector where you are currently employed

- Government Sector (State)
- Government Sector (Federal)
- Not for Profit
- Non-Government
- University Sector
- Union
- Private Sector
- Private Practice
- Prefer not to say
- Other

Please let us know your current role (select all that are appropriate)

- Executive Leadership
- Manager
- Administration
- Supervisor
- Front Line Service Delivery
- Private Practitioner
- Policy/Advocacy
- Academic/Research
- Student
- Not currently employed

Other (please specify)

Please let us know the status of your employment

- Part time
- Full time
- Contract
- Continuing
- Student
- Not applicable

Please let us know how long you have been working in the social services sector

- 0 - 5 years
- 6 - 10 years
- 11 - 15 years
- 16 - 20 years
- 21 - 30 years +

Do you have a tertiary qualification?

- Yes
- Currently studying
- No

If yes, please let us know your qualification (s) tick all that apply

- PhD Social Work PhD
- Masters Social Work Masters
- Bachelor Social Work
- Bachelor of Criminology
- Bachelor of Sociology
- Bachelor of Arts
- Bachelor of Social Sciences
- Bachelor of Psychology
- Diploma of Community Services
- Diploma of Counselling
- Certificate of Community Services
- Certificate of Child Youth Services
- Certificate of Youth Work
- Other (please specify)

Are you a member of the Australian Association of Social Workers

- Yes
- No

Let us know what you think!

Before you begin, we recommend that you have read the companion document and in particular, the section defining social work and social work in the Australian context.

This section asks you to consider the proposed Scope of Practice and Social Work Services definitions prepared by the Social Workers Registration Board. The Social Workers Registration Board are required by the Social Workers Registration Act 2021 (the Act) 'to consult with persons the Board considers are able to represent the views of social workers, or of classes of social workers, or views of employers of social workers, or organisations and members of organisations that the Board considers to be affected on the proposed definition of Scope of Practice and Social Work Services.'

This section asks you to comment on the following:

- **What is the Scope of Practice? (Part 1 and Part 2)**
- **What is the definition of Social Work Services?**
- **What are the functions and activities of social workers?**
- **What are the roles of social workers?**
- **Where social workers work?**
- **How social workers do their work?**

Consultation will inform the Board's decision, setting the boundaries of the Scope of Practice and defining Social Work Services. This will then inform registration, accreditation of education standards (including competency and conduct), and investigations of incompetency and misconduct.

Question 1: What is the Scope of Practice? (Part 1 & 2)

Preamble

The Social Workers Registration Act 2021 states that the Board must, when developing Scope of Practice have regard to the AASW Practice Standards 2013 (or its successors) and the Social Workers Registration Board of New Zealand. The AASW has published the Practice Standards (2023), which supersedes the Practice Standards 2013 (See YourSay page for copies of these documents). From these documents the Social Workers Registration Board propose the following definition of Scope of Practice.

Pt 1: What do social workers do and what competency is expected?

The Scope of Practice is the term used to refer to responsibilities, functions, and activities of a social worker that are performed in a range of roles or ways and reflects documents such as the AASW Code of Ethics (2020) and the AASW Practice Standards (2023). It is a requirement that a professional social worker recognise and work within the limits of their competence (this is their education and training).

Scope of Practice provides the answer to: What do social workers do and what competency is expected?

It can therefore be concluded that the Scope of Practice for social work is to:

- promote social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people
- adopt principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities
- engage people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

Do you agree with the proposal of what social workers do and what competency is expected?

- Yes I agree
- Yes I agree in principle but would like to suggest the following changes (please write changes in the text box)
- No, I do not agree with this definition and this is my reason why (please write reason in the text box)

Please write any changes or reason here

Pt 2: What are social workers' responsibilities?

It is a social worker's **responsibility** to influence persistent issues of poverty, inequality, violence, discrimination, and ongoing failures of a social system by:

- addressing wider impacts such as the historical impacts of colonisation, assimilation, institutional racism, exploitation, violence, neglect, oppression, and other social determinants of health
- actively challenging discriminatory practices, inequality and social injustice in organisations, systems, and wider society
- collaborating with individuals, children, groups, and communities to develop their own solutions to identified issues. They work to influence change at individual, child, family, community, government, and societal levels.

Do you agree that these are social workers' responsibilities?

- Yes I agree.
- Yes I agree in principle but would like to suggest the following changes (please write changes in text box below)
- No, I don't agree and here is my reason why (please write reason in the text box below)

Please write any changes or reason here

Question 2: What is the Definition of Social Work Services?

The Act states that 'the Board must, by notice in the Gazette, specify the meaning of the term Social Work Services for the purposes of this Act', and 'must, by notice in the Gazette, describe the Social Work Services that are performed by the social work profession in 1 or more scopes of practice.'

Here is the proposed definition of Social Work Services:

Social Work Services mean a service provided by a social worker performed in a general Scope of Practice for the purpose of engaging, assessing, analysing, formulating, intervening, evaluating, supporting, or protecting the wellbeing and safety of individuals, children, families, groups, or communities.

Do you agree with this proposed definition of Social Work Services?

- Yes I agree
- Yes I agree but would like to suggest the following changes (please write any changes in the text box below)
- No, I don't agree, and this is why (please write your reason in the text box)

Please write your amendments or comments here

Question 3: What are Social Work Services?

This section outlines the functions and activities of social workers as proposed by the Board. The Board is proposing these are functions and activities that can only be performed and managed by a registered social worker

Social workers facilitate outcomes for people through **functions** and **activities**.

It is therefore proposed that the following functions and activities can **only** be performed and managed by a registered social worker.

- Social workers undertake evidence-informed bio-psychosocial assessments, analysis, and interventions – and must holistically consider the context of a person’s situation and their environment.
- Social workers must apply in-depth interpersonal, communication, and relational skills to lead, manage, and problem solve complex factors that impact on safety and wellbeing of individuals, children, families, groups, and communities.
- Social workers must identify and respond to trauma, danger, and harm factors using an evidence-informed approach.
- Social workers must lead, manage, and address challenges, difficulty, and vulnerability that are experienced in situations where circumstances are not easily changed, and in doing so enhance and strengthen people’s ability and capacity in such circumstances.
- Social workers must assist people experiencing crisis to endure and adapt to uncertainty, loss, and grief.

Do you agree with this list of functions and activities that can only be performed and managed by social workers?

- Yes I agree
- Yes I agree in principle but would like to suggest the following changes (Please write your changes in the text box below)
- No, I don't agree and here is my reason why (Please write your reason in the text box below)

Please write your suggestions for change or reasons here

Question 4: What are Social Work Roles?

This section provides a list of social work roles as proposed by the Board.

Social workers can undertake such functions and activities and apply their expertise in a variety of roles and ways at macro, meso, and micro levels of practice including one or more of:

- one to one work
- groupwork
- system, service, program design
- therapy
- counselling
- consultancy
- protection, safeguarding.
- community development
- advising
- research
- education
- supervision
- facilitation
- advocacy
- crisis and case management
- policy development
- leadership

Do you agree with this list of roles and ways of working for social workers?

- Yes I agree
- Yes I agree but would add/take off these roles (please write in the text box below)
- No, I don't agree with this list and here is my reason why (please write reason in the text box below)

Please write your changes or reason here

Question 5: Where do social workers practice?

This section provides a comprehensive list of where social workers can practice as proposed by the Board.

Social workers can work in a variety of sectors and can be found in Federal and State government departments, non-government and not-for-profit organisations, community services, in private practice, and for-profit organisations. Social workers can work in a range of practice fields including but not limited to:

- mental health, health, disability, aged care, and hospitals
- child protection and child welfare
- domestic and family violence, and sexual violence
- family support
- LGBTQIA+
- addiction, gambling, alcohol, and other drugs
- housing and homelessness
- community centres
- income support
- criminal justice systems
- refugee and asylum seeker support
- veterans’ affairs
- palliative care
- rural and remote communities
- Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations
- schools, education, and academia

Each field of practice will/can have its own practice parameters and often social workers will work within an organisational practice framework that describes their work in more detail. However, with a general scope of practice, it provides title protection, direction for clear education, and competency standards that enables boundaries for investigations.

Do you agree with the list provided of where social workers can practise?

- Yes I agree
- Yes I agree in principle but would like the following amendments (please write in the text box below)
- No, I don't agree and here is my reason (s) why (please write in the text box below)

Please write your amendments or comments here

Question 6: How do social workers practice?

This final section proposes how social workers practice, the application of knowledge, as well as critical thinking, critical reflection and self-awareness.

The Social Work Services and Scope of Practice that a social worker is permitted to perform must be based on appropriate education, training, ethics, value systems and experience, that is, **how** social workers practise.

Social Workers are skilled in the application of **critical thinking, critical reflection** and **self-awareness** and commit to a process of ongoing learning and development and professional accountability to deliver the best service to people and communities.

Critical thinking means that social workers are skilled at seeking clarity through examination and evaluation of their own beliefs and actions. Critical thinking is not criticism, but rather pursuing a questioning and evaluation stance in decision making. Critical reflection comes from critical thinking because it enables a social worker to make decisions that can be scrutinised by others, clarify practice, and lead to better practice in the future. Critical thinking and reflection require self-awareness. Self-awareness is a mechanism of social work practice, requiring a high level of understanding about who we are and how we behave.

This is reflected in the AASW Code of Ethics 2020 and the Practice Standards 2023. However, the Act also states that social work must be underpinned by:

- Theories of social work
- Social sciences
- Humanities
- Indigenous knowledges.

Engagement with social work theories, social sciences, humanities, and Indigenous knowledges, together with critical reflection and ongoing learning are core elements of **how** a social worker uses their professional judgement and decision making in the Scope of Practice. These elements enable social workers to demonstrate identity and competency through their practice.

Theories of social work

Theoretical explanations can help social workers understand and make sense of a complex human world. Social workers are required to draw on a range of theoretical perspectives to help them respond through practice. Theories embrace both explanations and practical response strategies.

Social Sciences

Social sciences offer social workers knowledge in areas including society's institutions and structures, its histories, and its people.

Humanities

Humanities offer social workers knowledge about human society, culture, language, history and philosophy.

Indigenous Knowledges

Indigenous knowledges belong to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous knowledges are ways of being, doing and knowing. An interrelationship exists between Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous knowledges.

Non-Indigenous social workers cannot claim to be 'knowers' of Indigenous knowledges. The historical bias, privilege and ontological knowledge of non-Indigenous social workers must be understood and analysed to break down colonisation bias (decolonisation) and its effects on social work practice.

Non-Indigenous social workers are required, through Practice Standard 2, in AASW Practice Standards (2023) to work in close collaboration and consultation with Indigenous peoples and governance structures.

Do you agree with all these areas of knowledge underpinning how social workers practice?

- Yes I agree
- Yes I agree in principle but would like to suggest the following changes (please write changes in the text box below)
- No, I don't agree and here is my reason why (please write reason in the text box below)

Please write your changes or comments here

Scope of Practice and Social Work Services Consultation Survey

Anything else you would like us to know?

This section gives you the opportunity to let the Board know any other thoughts you may have about the proposed Scope of Practice and Social Work Services Definitions.

Please write any other feedback you have here

Thank you for taking the time to give us your feedback. We would like to keep you updated so please request to sign up to our mailing list if you haven't already e: swrb@sa.gov.au.

Please let us know your preferred method of communication

- Direct email
- Newsletter
- Contact through your organisation
- Other (please specify)

Appendix 2:



**Social Workers
Registration Board**
South Australia



Government
of South Australia

Companion Document

**Scope of Practice
and
Social Work Services
Sector Consultation
August 2024**



swrb.sa.gov.au



swrb@sa.gov.au

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country	2
From The Director	3
Introduction	4
Section 1: Background	4
Role of the Board	4
What is Social Work?	6
Australian Social Work	6
AASW Code of Ethics 2020.....	7
What do Social Workers Do?	7
AASW Practice Standards 2023.....	8
Section 2: Consultation Section	9
Question 1: Scope of Practice (Part 1)	9
Question 1: Scope of Practice (Part 2)	9
Question 2: What are Social Work Services?.....	10
Question 3: Social Workers Functions and Activities.....	10
Question 4: Social Workers Roles	11
Question 5: Where do social workers practice?.....	11
Question 6: How do Social Workers Practice?.....	12
Theories of social work	13
Social Sciences	13
Humanities	13
Indigenous Knowledges	13
Closing Comments	14

Acknowledgement of Country

The Social Workers Registration Board of South Australia (SWRB SA) acknowledge that the land we work on is the traditional lands of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and we pay our respects to elders, past, present, and emerging. The SWRB SA acknowledges, and respects that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Nations peoples of this country and recognises them as the traditional owners and occupants of South Australian land and waters. The SWRB SA acknowledge the violence of the colonial past and social work's part in this history and the impacts colonisation continues to have on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The SWRB SA also acknowledges the strong and enduring connection they have to land and culture – always was, always will be.

From The Director

South Australia is leading the way for social workers registration. This is a milestone in the history of the profession and discipline of social work.

The South Australian Parliament passed the [Social Workers Registration Act 2021](#) (the Act) and the Social Workers Registration (Commencement) Amendment Act 2023, setting the commencement date for registration on 1 July 2025 or earlier by proclamation. The Social Workers Registration Board was appointed in March 2024 and is responsible for the Act.

The purpose of the Social Workers Registration Board of South Australia is to ensure the safety and well-being of the public by upholding high standards of competence, accountability, and professionalism among social workers.

Registration strives to enhance quality and effectiveness of social work practice. Registration restricts the use of the title: social worker, determines the qualifications, pathways to registration, and determines other requirements appropriate for registration – particularly definitions of Social Work Services and Scope of Practice.

According to the Act, The Social Workers Registration Board must define Social Work Services and Social Work Scope and Practice. This paper provides these definitions.

Kind Regards



Professor Sarah Wendt

Introduction

Welcome to the Scope of Practice and Social Work Services Consultation!

We are really pleased that you are participating in this important and historic milestone. This is the sector consultation companion document providing detailed information and background into the decisions of the Board and rationale for the Scope of Practice and Social Work Services definition.

The document is in two sections. Section 1 provides background information and details the role of the board, the definition of social work and social work in the Australian context, and summaries of the key parts of the AASW Code of Ethics (2020) and AASW Practice Standards (2023). Section 2 is the consultation section made up of 6 questions. Each question details the rationale the Board has used to compose the definition. Once you have read this document, please go to the survey on the YourSAy page and let us know what you think.

Section 1: Background

Role of the Board

The Social Workers Registration Act 2021 (the Act), states that the Board must:

- **Prepare or endorse codes of conduct, professional standards, and ethical guidelines for registered social workers.**
- If a code of conduct, professional standard or set of ethical guidelines is prepared or endorsed by the Board, the Board must:
 - (a) cause a copy of the code, standard or guidelines to be published on the Board's website, together with a statement of the operative date of the code, standard or guidelines (which may not be a date earlier than the date of publication); and
 - (b) take reasonable steps to send a copy of the code, standard or set of guidelines to each social worker to whom it applies; and
 - (c) ensure that a copy of the code, standard or set of guidelines is kept available for public inspection without charge during normal office hours at the principal office of the Registrar.
- The Board must, by notice in the Gazette, specify the meaning of the term **Social Work Services** for the purposes of the Act.
- The Board must, by notice in the Gazette, **describe the Social Work Services that are performed by the social work profession in 1 or more Scopes of Practice.**
- **A Scope of Practice** and the services described in it may be described as the Board thinks fit, including in 1 or more of the following ways:

- (a) by reference to a name or form of words that is commonly understood by persons who work in the social work services sector.
 - (b) by reference to an area of social science or learning.
 - (c) by reference to tasks commonly performed.
 - (d) by reference to individual, interpersonal, or community needs to be alleviated.
- The Board must, when developing Scopes of Practice for the purposes of this section, have regard to:
 - (a) the Practice Standards 2013 (or its successor), published by the Australian Association of Social Workers; and
 - (b) any information about the scope of social work practice published by the Australian Association of Social Workers; and
 - (c) the scheme for registration of social workers established by the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 of New Zealand; and
 - (d) the development of social work scopes of practice by the Social Workers Registration Board of New Zealand.

What is Social Work?

The definition of social work is taken from the International Federation of Social Workers:

“Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.”

Social Workers aim to achieve social justice and human rights which is central to the professional identity and academic discipline of social work. Social workers work with, and on behalf of, individuals, children, families, groups, communities, and societies to:

- enhance their individual and collective wellbeing and social development
- resolve personal and interpersonal problems
- improve and to facilitate engagement with the broader society
- address systemic barriers to full recognition and participation
- protect the vulnerable from oppression and abuse¹.

Australian Social Work

In the Australian context, to achieve social justice and human rights which is central to the identity of social work, the profession and discipline of social work must recognise that Australia is a white settler colonial society after the invasion of the British, which resulted in the denial of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and sovereignty.

This history of dispossession from lands, denigration of culture and knowledges, and attempted genocide has impacted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, resulting in collective, community, and intergenerational trauma. Social Work played an active role in the processes of colonisation including protectionism, assimilation, and stolen generations².

It also needs to be recognised in the Australian context that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people resisted oppressive government policies, actions and practices and continue to do so today. The strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and culture is long and enduring.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be social work clients due to intergenerational trauma and disadvantage of colonisation. Therefore, Social Work in Australia needs to be honest and acknowledge the profession’s role in perpetuating trauma. This can only be rectified if social

¹ <https://aasw-prod.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/AASW-Code-of-Ethics-2020.pdf>

² Bennett, B., & Green, S. (Eds.). (2019). Our voices : Aboriginal social work. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

workers engage in truth-telling and reconciliation practices to enable culturally safe spaces for learning, sharing, and respect³.

Social Workers must recognise Australian history and be trained and equipped to respond within the context of this history. All social workers, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds, are required to take a proactive stance with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to demonstrate their respect, allyship and commitment to uphold their rights.

AASW Code of Ethics 2020

To achieve the aims of both the profession and discipline of social work, the Australian Association of Social Work has developed a [Code of Ethics 2020](#) (The Code). The Code outlines the ethical principles and conduct that are required of social workers to ensure effective, professional, and accountable social work practice in all social work contexts. The Code assists all social workers, collectively and individually, to act in ethically accountable ways because social workers are bound by three core principles:

- Respect for persons.
- Social Justice.
- Professional integrity.

The Code expresses the principles and responsibilities that are integral to, and characterise, the social work profession. It is intended to assist all social workers, and social work students currently enrolled in an accredited social work program collectively and individually, to act in ethical and accountable ways in the pursuit of the profession's aims.

The Social Workers Registration Board intends to endorse the AASW Code of Ethics 2020 because it:

- provides a guide and standard for ethical social work conduct and service delivery
- provides a foundation for ethical reflection and decision making
- guides social workers when determining their reciprocal rights with employers and colleagues
- provides clarification of social workers' actions in the context of industrial or legal disputes
- seeks to protect practitioners and public alike from malpractice
- holds social workers accountable for their ethical practice and acts as a basis for investigation and adjudication of formal complaints about unethical conduct.

What do Social Workers Do?

The Act states that the Board must, when developing Scopes of Practice, have regard to the AASW Practice Standards 2013 (or its successors) and the Social Workers Registration Board of New Zealand.

The AASW has published the Practice Standards 2023, which supersedes the Practice Standards 2013.

³ Bennett, B., & Gates, T. G. (2022). Decolonization and trauma-informed truth-telling about Indigenous Australia in a social work diversity course: a cultural safety approach. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 33(3), 153–166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2022.2154882>

AASW Practice Standards 2023

The [AASW Practice Standards 2023](#) enable social workers to demonstrate their professional identity through their practice and ensure trust and confidence in the profession for the public and service users. The AASW Practice Standards 2023 are integral for registration because the purpose of registration is to enhance the professional standards of social work and to better protect the public.

The Social Workers Registration Board intends to endorse the AASW Practice Standards 2023 because they provide the basis for registration, accreditation criteria of teaching programs, competency/capability statements, and measures for investigation. They provide a reference point for assuring accreditation of teaching programs, quality of practice, and make social workers accountable to the people they serve.

There are nine Practice Standards.

Standard 1: Social workers conduct themselves according to the values, principles, and guidelines of the AASW Code of Ethics 2020.

Standard 2: Social workers practice in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to support their priorities and aspirations.

Standard 3: Social workers advocate for policy initiatives and approaches to practice aimed at achieving fair and equitable access for people to social, health, economic, environmental, and political resources.

Standard 4: Social workers practice respectfully and inclusively regarding culture and diversity.

Standard 5: Social workers practice within a professional knowledge framework informed by a critical understanding of contemporary social work theory and research.

Standard 6: Social workers make professional decisions based on a holistic assessment of the needs, strengths, goals, and preferences of people.

Standard 7: Social workers actively contribute to strengthening and promoting the identity and standing of the profession.

Standard 8: Social workers build and strengthen their practice through regular structured supervision from social work qualified supervisors.

Standard 9: Social workers monitor their skills, knowledge, and expertise to maintain, improve and broaden their professional development.

Section 2: Consultation Section

This section provides details for each of the corresponding questions in the survey. You can read the details here and they are also included in the survey if you find that easier. In the survey, you will be asked to answer in one of three ways:

- Yes, I agree.
- Yes, I agree but would like the following changes or additions.
- No, I don't agree, and this is the reason why.

In the survey, a text box is provided so you can write your answers or any comments.

Question 1: What is the Scope of Practice? (Part 1)

The Scope of Practice is the term used to refer to the range of responsibilities, functions, and activities of a social worker that are performed in a range of roles or ways and reflects documents such as the AASW Code of Ethics (2020) and the AASW Practice Standards (2023) (see above). It also is a requirement that the professional social worker recognise and work within the limits of their competence (this is their education and training) ⁴.

Scope of Practice provides the answer to: What do social workers do and what competency is expected?

It can therefore be concluded that the Scope of Practice for social work is to⁵:

- promote social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people
- adopt principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities
- engage people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

Question 1: What is the Scope of Practice? (Part 2)

It is therefore a social worker's **responsibility** to influence persistent issues of poverty, inequality, violence, discrimination, and ongoing failures of social systems by:

- addressing wider impacts such as the historical impacts of colonisation, assimilation, institutional racism, exploitation, violence, abuse, neglect, oppression, and other social determinants of health

⁴ Leslie, K., Moore, J., Robertson, C., Bilton, D., Hirschhorn, K., Langelier, M., & Bourgeault, I. (2021). Regulating health professional scopes of practice: comparing institutional arrangements and approaches in the US, Canada, Australia, and the UK. *Human Resources for Health*, 19(15). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12960-020-00550-3>

⁵ The definition has been informed by AASW and SWRB New Zealand.

- actively challenging discriminatory practices, inequality, and social injustice in organisations, systems, and wider society
- collaborating with individuals, children, groups, and communities to develop their own solutions to identified issues and work to influence change at individual, child, family, community, government, and societal levels.

Question 2: What are Social Work Services?

The Act states that the Board must, by notice in the Gazette, specify the meaning of the term **Social Work Services** for the purposes of this Act, and must, by notice in the Gazette, describe the Social Work Services that are performed by the social work profession in 1 or more Scopes of Practice.

It is therefore proposed that:

Social Work Services mean a service provided by a social worker performed in a general Scope of Practice for the purpose of engaging, assessing, analysing, formulating, intervening, evaluating, supporting, or protecting the wellbeing and safety of individuals, children, families, groups, or communities⁶.

Question 3: What are Social Workers Functions and Activities?

Social Workers support outcomes for people through **functions and activities**. **It is therefore proposed that the following functions and activities can only be performed and managed by a registered social worker.**

- Social Workers undertake evidence-informed bio-psychosocial assessments, analysis, and interventions – and must holistically consider the context of a person’s situation and their environment.
- Social Workers must apply in-depth interpersonal, communication, and relational skills to lead, manage, and problem solve complex factors that impact on the safety and wellbeing of individuals, children, families, groups, and communities.
- Social Workers must identify and respond to trauma, danger, and harm factors using an evidence informed approach.
- Social Workers must lead, manage, and address challenges, difficulty, and vulnerability that are experienced in situations where circumstances are not easily changed, and in doing so enhance and strengthen people’s ability and capacity in such circumstances.
- Social Workers must assist people experiencing crisis to endure and adapt to uncertainty, loss, and grief.

⁶ This definition has been informed by the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Act 2003.

- actively challenging discriminatory practices, inequality, and social injustice in organisations, systems, and wider society
- collaborating with individuals, children, groups, and communities to develop their own solutions to identified issues and work to influence change at individual, child, family, community, government, and societal levels.

Question 2: What are Social Work Services?

The Act states that the Board must, by notice in the Gazette, specify the meaning of the term **Social Work Services** for the purposes of this Act, and must, by notice in the Gazette, describe the Social Work Services that are performed by the social work profession in 1 or more Scopes of Practice.

It is therefore proposed that:

Social Work Services mean a service provided by a social worker performed in a general Scope of Practice for the purpose of engaging, assessing, analysing, formulating, intervening, evaluating, supporting, or protecting the wellbeing and safety of individuals, children, families, groups, or communities⁶.

Question 3: What are Social Workers Functions and Activities?

Social Workers support outcomes for people through **functions and activities**. **It is therefore proposed that the following functions and activities can only be performed and managed by a registered social worker.**

- Social Workers undertake evidence-informed bio-psychosocial assessments, analysis, and interventions – and must holistically consider the context of a person’s situation and their environment.
- Social Workers must apply in-depth interpersonal, communication, and relational skills to lead, manage, and problem solve complex factors that impact on the safety and wellbeing of individuals, children, families, groups, and communities.
- Social Workers must identify and respond to trauma, danger, and harm factors using an evidence informed approach.
- Social Workers must lead, manage, and address challenges, difficulty, and vulnerability that are experienced in situations where circumstances are not easily changed, and in doing so enhance and strengthen people’s ability and capacity in such circumstances.
- Social Workers must assist people experiencing crisis to endure and adapt to uncertainty, loss, and grief.

⁶ This definition has been informed by the New Zealand Social Workers Registration Act 2003.

Question 4: What are Social Workers Roles?

Social Workers can undertake such functions and activities and apply their expertise in a variety of **ways** and **roles** at macro, meso, and micro levels of practice including one or more of:

- one to one work
- groupwork
- system, service, and program design
- therapy
- counselling
- consultancy
- protection and safeguarding
- community development
- advising
- research
- education
- supervision
- facilitation
- advocacy
- crisis and case management
- policy development
- leadership.

Question 5: Where do social workers practice?

Social Workers can work in a variety of sectors and can be found in Federal and State government departments, non-government organisations, community services, in private practice, and not-for-profit and for-profit organisations. Social Workers can work in a range of practice fields including but not limited to:

- mental health, health, disability, aged care, and hospitals
- child protection and child welfare
- domestic and family violence, and sexual violence
- family support
- LGBTQIA+
- addiction, gambling, alcohol, and other drugs
- housing and homelessness
- community centres
- income support
- criminal justice systems
- refugee and asylum seeker support
- veterans' affairs
- palliative care
- rural and remote communities
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations

- schools, education, academia.⁷

Each field of practice will/can have its own practice parameters and often social workers will work within an organisational practice framework that describes their work in more detail⁸. However, with a general scope of practice, it provides title protection, direction for clear education, and competency standards that enables boundaries for investigations.

Question 6: How do Social Workers Practice?

The Social Work Services and Scope of Practice that a social worker is permitted to perform must be based on appropriate education, training, ethics, value systems, and experience, that is, **how** social workers practice.

Social Workers are skilled in the application of **critical thinking, critical reflection, and self-awareness**, and commit to a process of ongoing learning and development and professional accountability to deliver the best service to people and communities.

Critical thinking means that social workers are skilled at seeking clarity through examination and evaluation of their own beliefs and actions. Critical thinking is not criticism but rather pursuing a questioning and evaluation stance in decision making. Critical reflection comes from critical thinking because it enables a social worker to make decisions that can be scrutinised by others, clarify practice, and lead to better practice in the future. Critical thinking and reflection require self-awareness. Self-awareness is a mechanism of social work practice, requiring a high level of understanding about who we are and how we behave⁹.

This is reflected in the AASW Code of Ethics 2020 and the Practice Standards 2023. However, the Act also states that social work must be underpinned by:

- theories of social work
- social sciences
- humanities
- Indigenous knowledges.

Engagement with social work theories, social sciences, humanities, and Indigenous knowledges, together with critical reflection and ongoing learning are core elements of **how** a social worker uses their professional judgement and decision making when providing Social Work Services in the Scope of Practice. These elements enable social workers to demonstrate identity and competency through their practice.

⁷ Also supported by Chenoweth, L & McAuliffe, D (originally published 2008 – now 7th ed), *The Road to Social Work & Human Service Practice*, Cengage Learning Australia,

⁸ The Scopes of Practice have been defined using AASW, NZASW, & NZ Registration Board resources.

⁹ Chenoweth, L & McAuliffe, D (originally published 2008 – now 7th ed), *The Road to Social Work & Human Service Practice*, Cengage Learning Australia.

Theories of social work

Theoretical explanations can help social workers understand and make sense of a complex human world. Social workers are required to draw on a range of theoretical perspectives to help them respond through practice. Theories embrace both explanations and practical response strategies.¹⁰

Social Sciences

Social sciences offer social workers knowledge in areas including society's institutions and structures, its histories, and its people.¹¹

Humanities

Humanities offer social workers knowledge about human society, culture, language, history, and philosophy.¹²

Indigenous Knowledges

Indigenous knowledges belong to Indigenous peoples. Indigenous knowledges are ways of being, doing, and knowing. An interrelationship exists between Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous knowledges.¹³

Non-Indigenous social workers cannot claim to be 'knowers' of Indigenous knowledges. The historical bias, privilege, and ontological knowledge of non-Indigenous social workers must be understood and analysed to break down colonisation bias (decolonisation) and its effects on social work practice.¹⁴

Non-Indigenous social workers are required through Practice Standard 2 to work in close collaboration and consultation with Indigenous peoples and governance structures.

¹⁰ Connolly, M, Harms, L., Maidment, J (2017), *Social Work Contexts and Practice*, 4th ed, Oxford University Press, London.

¹¹ <https://socialsciences.org.au/about-the-social-sciences/>

¹² <https://humanities.org.au/about-2/>

¹³ Bennett, B & Green, S (2019) *Our Voices: Aboriginal Social Work*, 2nd ed, Macmillan International, London.

¹⁴ Bennett, B (2020) What to bring when you are told not to bring a thing: The need for protocols in acknowledging Indigenous knowledges and participants in Australian research, *Journal of Sociology*, 56, 2, 167-183.

Closing Comments

The Social Workers Registration Board is responsible to fulfill the primary objects of the Act including:

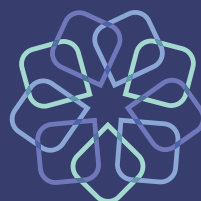
- to establish and maintain a registration system for social workers
- to safeguard the public interest by ensuring that only suitably trained and qualified persons are able to practise as social workers
- to encourage the maintenance of high professional standards of both competence and conduct by registered social workers
- to ensure that registered social workers are held accountable professionally for the conduct of their practice.

The endorsement of the AASW Code of Ethics (2020) and Practice Standards (2023), together with the proposed definitions of Social Work Services and Scope of Practice are key to fulfilling these objectives, as well as consensus on the education of social workers. The definitions inform registration, accreditation of education standards (including competency and conduct), and investigations of incompetency and misconduct.



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