

# Submission

<b>To</b>	Social Workers Registration Board
<b>Topic</b>	Scope of Practice and Social Work Services Sector Consultation
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## Contact

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## Submission to the South Australian Social Workers Registration Board's Scope of Practice and Social Work Services Consultation

Uniting Communities welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the South Australian Social Workers Registration Board's Scope of Practice and Social Work Services Consultation.

In principle, Uniting Communities supports the intention of the Social Worker Registration Scheme and, when it is appropriately operationalised, hopes that it will achieve its' objectives of enhancing the quality and effectiveness of social work practice.

We support the notion that individuals that complete an approved/accredited Social Work degree can apply for registration with the scheme in order to formally recognise their professional status.

However, we do **not** support the proposition that **only** registered social workers can perform and manage the functions and activities outlined on page 10 of the consultation's Companion Document, which would have a significant, negative impact on the not-for-profit sector.

Non-government organisations (NGOs) employ thousands of staff that regularly undertake these activities and functions who have completed other tertiary qualifications. For example, the minimum education requirement for many "Case Worker" roles is a Certificate IV in Community Services, or an undergraduate degree in either psychology, social science, humanities OR social work. By broadening the reach of social work registration to incorporate these myriad allied roles risks undermining the very intent of the scheme.

These staff and these roles have not traditionally been considered to be undertaking Social Work as conventionally defined within the sector. The administrative burden of capturing this cohort into the scheme would be unreasonably onerous for both the organisations involved and for the staff and likely to act as a deterrent for recruiting and retaining staff to undertake these important roles.

### Our Key Recommendations:

- **Either the Social Workers Registration Act 2021 or the Social Workers Registration (Commencement) Amendment Act 2023 is amended to reflect;**
  - **only South Australian Government staff employed in Social Worker specific roles are required to be registered with the Scheme as of 1 July 2025,**
  - **a review of the implementation of the Scheme is completed 18 months after the commencement of the scheme, and necessary and appropriate adjustments to the Act are made,**
  - **for social workers and social work positions outside of the South Australian Government, registration is required by 1 July 2027 after the definitions have been further refined.**

**In addition, we recommend that;**

- **NGO's that employ registered social workers are appropriately supported to implement the Scheme as of 1 July 2027.**
- **staff using the knowledge and skills gained through completing a qualification in social work, employed in an administrative, project, managerial, or academic capacity can voluntarily sign up to register for the scheme, however, are NOT required by law to be registered with the Social Workers Registration Board.**

## Additional Comments

### 1. Social Workers' Functions and Activities

It is detailed on page 10 of the Companion Document associated with the Scope of Practice and Social Work Services Sector Consultation:

*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.*

We acknowledge that anyone undertaking the above functions and activities must have completed an appropriate level of education and training. We do not agree, however, that only those that have completed an accredited/approved Social Work degree are capable of undertaking these tasks. Many of these staff are not registered with another body (we refer to FAQ 8 published on your website).

In addition, the administrative burden of capturing this cohort into the scheme would be unreasonably onerous for both the organisations involved, the Board and the staff. As such, it will likely act as a deterrent for recruiting and retaining staff in these important roles.

Furthermore, the activities articulated above are used across countless professional domains and cannot be exclusively attributed to discipline of social work.

It is suggested that a similar position is reached to what currently occurs in the discipline of psychology. Hundreds of students per year in South Australia complete an undergraduate or honours degree in psychology. These students are not able to refer to themselves as "psychologists" and must go on to complete additional post graduate study and apply for registration before they are able to apply for employment and practice as a "psychologist".

This is well understood in the social services sector and undergraduate psychology degree graduates are well placed to undertake duties similar to the ones outlined above. Only a small percentage of undergraduate psychology degree students go on to become registered psychologists.

### 2. Support to implement the Scheme

Following the successful implementation of the social worker registration scheme across South Australian government departments, we recommend that a comprehensive document is developed that clearly

outlines the roles and responsibilities of NGO's, organisations and businesses that will employ "registered social workers".

This document will clearly outline the expectations of the employer and highlight the penalties associated with non-compliance of the Act. Additional workshops and or seminars with the social services sector (possibly led in collaboration with SACOSS and other relevant peak bodies) are also recommended.

## Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to provide input into the South Australian Social Workers Registration Board's Scope of Practice and Social Work Services Consultation.

We look forward to working with the Social Workers Registration Board to improve and enhance the quality and effectiveness of social work practice.