

2022-2023 Australian Budget Priorities

AASW Submission

JANUARY 2022



AASW

Australian Association
of Social Workers

About the Australian Association of Social Workers

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the national professional body representing more than 15,000 social workers throughout Australia. The AASW works to promote the profession of social work including setting the benchmarks for professional education and practice in social work, while also advocating on matters of human rights to advance social justice.

Acknowledgements

This submission has been developed in consultation with AASW members who are working across Australia in various social work areas of practice. We want to acknowledge their inputs to our consultation survey.

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I. SUMMARY OF BUDGET PROPOSALS

A. Social work workforce investment

That the federal budget invests:

- \$3 million dollars annually to establish a registration scheme of the social work profession.
- \$5 million annually to increase amount of fees paid to AMHSW's under Better Access.
- \$255,222,000 over 4 years to support social work students to complete their Field Education course requirements.
- \$17 million subsidy for service providers to employ a full time qualified social work supervisor to create social work student placement opportunities.
- In scholarships for social work students enrolled in regional tertiary institutions.
- In scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work students from remote and rural areas.
- In additional supports for social work students completing Field Education placements in regional and rural areas (including transport and accommodation etc).
- In rural social work graduate positions in rural and regional areas to create more entry level positions and to attract workers from regional areas and major cities.
- In the re-direction of funding from National School Chaplaincy Program to staffing a social worker in every school at maximum rate of 500 students per social worker.

B. Social investment

That the federal budget invests:

- In raising the level of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Abstudy and Parenting Payment to the rate of the Age Pension.
- In raising the level of other Assistance payments as specified in the Raise the Rate for Good campaign.
- In secure, affordable housing for all in accordance with 5 strategies of the Everybody's Home Campaign.
- In the redirection of current subsidies and investment from fossil fuels to initiatives which reduce the current and future health impacts and risks associated with increasing global temperature, sea level rise, and food and water insecurity.
- In a climate change policy which ensures that the costs associated with a changing climate are distributed equitably.
- In the retro-active adaptation of existing housing for renters and people on low incomes to control temperature more effectively, improve energy efficiency, decrease carbon emissions and boost the economy.

- In effective and sustainable adaptation responses by communities to the full range of health impacts linked to climate change.
- In updating building codes to adopt and ensure sustainable and carbon neutral (or negative) design and materials.
- In financial incentives for local communities to coordinate local needs including use of micro-gridding, community farms and other localised systems.

C. Increased service capacity

That the federal budget further invests:

- In the NDIS for timely and effective Local Area Co-ordination, planning and complex support co-ordination.
- In enabling the overhaul of the aged care system as recommended by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.
- Enabling an increase in respite care for people with dementia to an amount that is double the current amount for the next financial year.
- \$365 million into palliative care services, to ease demand pressures on the health and aged care systems.

II. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR THIS SUBMISSION

Social workers provide services to vulnerable, marginalised people in relation to their physical and mental health, poverty, housing, disability, family violence, child protection and family support. As the community emerges from more than two years of crisis caused by bushfires and a pandemic, social workers have been the profession most closely exposed to the decrease in the community's overall wellbeing. Due to the breadth of contexts in which social workers are employed, and issues they deal with, social work is the profession most able to document the impact of this decline across all aspects of people's lives. Social work is also the profession most exposed to the critical shortages and demand pressures in the health and community sectors.¹

¹ ACOSS, Meeting community needs in difficult Times: Experiences of Australia's community sector, ACOSS, April 2021, https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/meeting-community-needs-in-difficult-times_experiences-of-Australias-community-sector_WEB_v2.pdf, Accessed 20/01/22.

"Social Workers deal with complex clients with multiple issues that intertwine and impact on a person's ability to manage daily living tasks. Due to language barriers, increased illness, domestic violence, ageing related decline, quite frankly the list goes on and on. The challenges are many including the lack of workers to support people in the community. Drugs and alcohol have increased, as has gambling (thanks to the easy access with technology). It would be beautiful if processes within government departments did not take so very long. I haven't heard anyone speak of a good experience at Centrelink - not one. I find this concerning." AASW Member.

As well as increasing demand for services, the economic changes brought by the pandemic have created a second impact on social workers' work. The economic disruption has led to a decrease in the amount of community contributions to the community sector. Many community services are critically under-resourced, creating shortfalls which are being filled by unpaid work performed by its predominantly female, already underpaid, workforce.²

AASW members have nominated 3 main avenues by which this decline can be addressed, and call on the federal government to use its next federal budget to:

- invest in the key social determinants of health;
- increase capacity of existing services; and,
- invest in the social work workforce.

III. AASW BUDGET PRIORITIES

A. Investment in the social work workforce

Social workers provide frontline services to marginalised people who are often experiencing vulnerability in relation to a range of issues and in a range of settings. This has also meant social workers have been essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their work has been vital in keeping the health and community services active. Simultaneous Royal Commissions and government inquiries into child protection, aged care, disability, mental health, family violence and other issues have all demonstrated that qualified, professional workers are required in these fields.

² ACOSS, *Meeting Demand in the Shadow of the Delta outbreak: Community Sector Experiences*, ACOSS, December 2021, https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Demand-snapshot_ACSS-2021_v3.pdf accessed 27/01/22 .

Subsequently, there is a strong demand for a highly qualified and experienced social worker workforce. Some fields of practice in which social work has been the dominant profession, such as child protection, continue to experience workforce shortages, and require more qualified social workers and strategies for attracting workers and retaining workers.

1. *Registration of the social work profession*

The AASW has long advocated for the registration of the social work profession in Australia.³ As the demand for the services of social workers continues to grow, the quality of this workforce will remain central to ensuring that health and wellbeing services are effective.

The AASW places a high priority on the quality of services that vulnerable people receive. In lieu of a national registration scheme, the AASW has undertaken the task of determining and monitoring professional standards for social workers, including upholding educational, ethical and practice standards. While processes are rigorous and robust, self-regulation exposes three key gaps:

- **Majority of social workers sit outside any regulatory system.** Less than 50% of all social workers in Australia are members of the AASW. This means that the majority of social workers practicing in Australia do not have a relationship with the AASW, are not accountable to a social work-specific code of ethics, may not have access to resources and CPD opportunities, and are not subject to the AASW's compliance regime. with respect to ethical practice.
- **Unsafe social workers can continue to practice in Australia leading to greater risk of to the public.** If a complaint about an AASW member is upheld, and the AASW terminates that membership, the social worker can continue to practice as a non-AASW member. The AASW's process does not have the power to determine fitness to practice or prevent expelled members from ongoing social work practice; nor can the details of serious misconduct or the name and actions of the social workers be made available in the public domain.
- **People without a social work qualification can claim to be a social worker.** Unlike regulatory authorities in countries where social work is registered, the AASW has no jurisdiction over misuse of the social work title.

In 2021 the South Australian Parliament passed the Social Work Registration Bill establishing the first registration scheme for social workers at a state level. This is not sufficient. Social workers in every state and territory need to be registered and there is urgent need for a national scheme. The AASW currently spends in excess of \$850,000 annually to self-regulate our 15,000 members. Given that the AASW's membership consists of approximately 1/3 of all qualified social workers in

³ AASW Annual Report 2020-2021, <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/13611>, accessed 20/012022.

Australia,⁴ the cost of this function can be reasonably estimated for the whole of the social work workforce, at AUD \$3 million.

The AASW recommends that the federal budget invest \$3 million to establish a national registration scheme of the social work profession.

Establish a National Registration Scheme for the Social Work Budget Proposal:

- That the federal budget invest \$3 million dollars annually to allow for the registration of the social work profession.

2. Medicare Benefit Schedule fee for Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs)

Currently, more than 2,700 Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs), are recognised providers of Focused Psychological Strategies (FPS) under the Better Access Initiative. They work with people across the lifespan (including children, adults and older persons), providing a unique contribution to their clients' mental health in their holistic approach. The advanced training that is expected of AMHSW prepares and provides them with the skills for working with people with very complex presentations and co-morbidities. More than 40% of AMHSWs provide services in regional and remote Australia. Access to public or community clinical services is often limited in these locations and AMHSW's are the main mental health professional for many rural communities.

Despite providing services under the Better Access scheme and across the same FPS item numbers as eligible psychologists, social workers receive a lower schedule fee across all FPS items. In 2020-21, the total pay disparity between AMHSWs and eligible psychologists has amounted to almost AUD\$ 5 million (see [Appendix I](#)). The AASW strongly recommends that the Australian Government address this inequity and formally recognise the skills and expertise of AMHSWs and their contribution to people's health.

"With the increased demand on accessing mental health services, (Accredited Mental Health) social workers are doing more with less resources, and pay. The pandemic is not over and I am concerned about the long term effects on individuals, families and the community post pandemic." AASW member.

⁴ Australian Government Labour Market Industry Projections 2020-2025, <https://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/EmploymentProjections>, accessed 20/01/2022.

The AASW recommends that the government invest an additional \$5 million to the Better Access Initiative to rectify disparity between the amount paid to AMHSW's and the amount paid to psychologists.

Fee Parity Budget Proposals:

- That the budget invests \$5 million annually to raise the amount of fees paid to AMHSW's under Better Access

3. Commonwealth funded supports for social work students field education

The AASW welcomed the government's recognition that social work is a job-ready qualification and that it should remain on the lower tier of higher education fees. Nevertheless, social work students still face significant costs in completing their studies. Many social work students have chosen this profession after having experienced the disadvantages, discrimination, or vulnerabilities which social work addresses. Often this means that they enter social work studies with established vulnerabilities or disadvantages.

The defining feature of a social work qualification is the compulsory field education placements of 140 days' or 1000 hours of practical experience. While ensuring the status as a job-ready qualification, it places an extra financial burden on students by making it extremely difficult for them to continue paid employment during this section of their course.

Many social work students are forced into debt to complete their course and commence professional life with a disproportionately large higher education debt. Although it provides necessary assistance to the most vulnerable people in society, social work is not a high-earning profession which adds to the debt burden over the social workers' lifetime.

In addition, the recent review of University-Industry Collaboration in teaching and learning showcases a greater need for Work Integrated Learning and has recommended a financial incentive for prospective hosts to create student placement opportunities.⁵ The AASW endorses this recommendation. Our members told us that service providers, in particular, smaller community services, often do not have any financial incentive to host student placements or simply do not have the eligible staff for providing on-site supervision. Due to the increasing number of students enrolled in a qualifying social work degree, there has been a lack of placement opportunities. As the association working in partnership with universities to deliver student placements, we understand

⁵ See <https://www.dese.gov.au/higher-education-reviews-and-consultations/resources/universityindustry-collaboration-teaching-and-learning-review>

there are more than 2000 students completing at least one supervised placement annually and the ratio of a full-time (1 FTE) supervisor to student is recommended to be 1 to 10. By financially supporting prospective placement hosts to employ a qualified social work supervisor, it creates incentive to increase the number of social work placement, which will enhance Work Integrated Learning and improve employment outcomes. The cost for subsidising a full-time social work supervisor per 10 students on placement is at the minimum of 17 million annually.

To meet the continuing demand for social work students, the AASW recommends that a budget priority be the creation of a scholarship scheme to support the living costs of social work students during the period of their Field Education placements. The AASW recommends that the scholarships be tied to the rate of the Age Pension and that they cover the period of Field Education for each student. The estimated cost of this initiative is \$257,222,000 over 4 years.⁶

Support for Field Education Budget Proposals:

- That the budget invests \$255,222,000 over 4 years to invest in scholarships for social work students to complete their field Education course requirements.
- That the budget invests in the minimum of \$17 million for prospective placement hosts to create placement opportunities for social work students.

4. Incentives for rural and remote workforce

The AASW welcomed last year's announcement of initiatives to encourage health and allied health workers to practice in regional and rural communities.⁷ Nevertheless, the initiatives did not nominate social workers for inclusion in any of the allocations, despite the level of demand remaining high. With continuing shortages of health, allied health and mental health services, social workers in rural and remote areas are supporting clients with more complex needs and doing so with fewer resources.⁸

AASW members report that the COVID pandemic has exacerbated existing social work workforce concerns, contributing to workforce fatigue and burnout.

⁶ The costing for this initiative has been estimated by the AASW based on the assumption that each social work student will be required to complete 28 weeks of field education during the course of their degree. Although there are currently 19,000 enrolled students in Australia,⁶ they will not all complete their field education in any given year. Therefore, the costings for this initiative can most usefully be estimated for each completed degree, over a four-year period, rather than on an annual basis.

⁷<https://www.health.gov.au/ministers/the-hon-greg-hunt-mp/media/budget-2021-22-generational-change-and-record-investment-in-the-health-of-australians>

⁸ See: <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A86299> ; <https://ahpworkforce.com/allied-health-workforce-data-a-quick-and-dirty-analysis-shows-we-are-in-deep-strife/> ; and <https://www.ruralhealth.org.au/sites/default/files/publications/fact-sheet-allied-health.pdf>

The AASW believes that there are two measures through which the budget can invest in incentives to build the capacity of social work workforce in rural and remote Australia. The first is by ensuring that social workers are included in the initiatives announced for mental health and allied health practitioners in last year's budget. The second is by funding initiatives that support students from these communities and support students to undertake social work field education in those communities.

Rural and remote workforce Budget Proposals:

- That the criteria for inclusion in the \$28.8 million to grow the mental health workforce from last year's budget be extended to include social workers.
- Scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social work students from remote and rural areas.
- Additional supports for social work students completing Field Education placements in regional and rural areas (transport and accommodation etc).
- Investing in social work graduate positions in rural and regional areas to create more entry level positions and to attract workers from regional areas and major cities.

5. *School social work*

Social workers in schools are a well-established specialist area of social work practice and an example of the unique contribution that social work can make to the mental wellbeing of vulnerable people. School social workers improve the mental health of young people in schools by attending to the needs of everyone in that school community: the teachers, support staff and classmates. They lower the rates of ill-health by preventive and community-based approaches that benefit the whole school community.⁹ The Productivity Commission's recent report, *The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health* recommended that every secondary school should have at least one qualified social worker for students and the ratio of the practitioner to student is suggested to be at the minimal of 1:500.¹⁰ This ratio is based on the results of longitudinal and international studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of school social work: by delivering early intervention and crisis management services, more serious, long term needs were avoided.¹¹

⁹ AASW, *The Scope of Social Work Practice: School social work*, <https://www.aasw.asn.au/practitioner-resources/the-scope-of-social-work-practice>, accessed 20/01/22.

¹⁰ Australian Productivity Commission 2019, "Mental Health: Draft Report", accessed 29th Oct 2020, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/mental-health/draft/mental-health-draft-volume2.pdf>

¹¹ Franklin, C., Kim, J. S., & Tripodi, S. J. (2009). A meta-analysis of published school social work practice studies: 1980-2007. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 19(6), 667-677.

Currently, the Australian government has committed more than \$247 million over 2019-2022 to funding chaplains in Australian schools. However, there has been minimal evidence and independent evaluation supporting that this program is staffed by qualified professionals who employ evidence-based intervention to improve the wellbeing of students. Based on existing evidence on child mental health and suicide prevention, the AASW recommends the Australian government to reallocate the funding to support every Australian school to employ at least one social worker (see [Appendix II](#)).

Social Work Workforce Investment Budget Proposal:

- That the Budgetary allocation that currently funds the National School Chaplaincy Program be re-directed to fund a social worker in every school and at maximum rate of 500 students per social worker.

B. Social investment

The AASW recognises that the federal government has increased the availability and duration of health services in response to COVID 19. The AASW is concerned that there have been missed opportunities during this period to address the social determinants of health which are contributing to people's needs for services. As has been the case in previous submissions, the AASW continues to point out that there is a direct connection between people's physical and mental health on the one hand, and their ability to afford the necessities of life.

1. Adequate levels of income support payments

The AASW has been a longstanding member of the campaign to ensure that people relying on income support payments receive an income that is adequate to afford the most basic necessities of life. This is one of the human rights to which Australia has made a formal commitment. As the Raise the Rate For Good Campaign has demonstrated, the current level of JobSeeker does not meet this threshold, and people who are forced to attempt to survive on Jobseeker have documented that they cannot afford three meals a day.¹²

Social workers observe the harm that is occurring every day to the people they work with by this enforced hardship and have nominated a rise in the level of income support as one of their priorities for this budget, pointing out that it would improve all aspects of the health and well-being of all

¹² ACOSS Raise The Rate For Good Campaign www.raisetherate.org.au, accessed 20/01/22.

JobSeeker recipients. AASW members have also identified the ineffective and punitive compliance regime that accompanies income support as a priority for change. They have observed that the greatest barrier to people acquiring employment is, in fact, the poverty enforced by the low rate of JobSeeker. Factors such as the inability to afford public transport or appropriate clothing to attend job interviews translate directly into an inability to secure a job.

The Raise the Rate for Good campaign has made 6 key recommendations.¹³ It has also demonstrated the increase in economic activity that such a rise would create, and the overall benefits it would bring to the economy. People who cannot afford to eat 3 meals every day, fill their prescriptions or replace their lightbulbs represent a clear case of unmet economic demand. Even if an unconscionable disregard for the wellbeing of other people were acceptable public policy, the economic stimulus that would flow from an increase in the level of income support should make this an obvious priority for the next budget.

Social Investment Budget Proposals:

- That the budget stimulates the economy by raising the level of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Abstudy, and Parenting Payment to the rate of the Age Pension.
- That budget further stimulates the economy by raising the level of other Assistance payments as specified in the Raise the Rate for Good campaign.

2. Accessible and affordable housing for all

The AASW is a long-standing member of the Everybody's Home campaign. Despite measures announced in the October 2020 Budget, Australia continues to experience a housing crisis and urgently requires more affordable housing to ensure that people on middle to low incomes have access to affordable and suitable housing. In fact, data released last year demonstrates that the housing situation for many people has become increasingly perilous.¹⁴ It shows that the costs of buying or renting houses has continued to rise while the proportion of social housing has further declined.

¹³ ACOSS, Raise The Rate For Good Campaign: About the Campaign, www.raisetherate.org.au/about, accessed 27/01/22

¹⁴ Everybody's home Social housing in Australia declines while rents and prices rise.

Many AASW members have pointed to the rights to safe housing, and the social justice dimension of the current housing shortage. Other members have described the added burden this creates for the whole service sector. Homelessness and housing insecurity have flow-on effects in many areas of people's lives and subsequently social workers who are employed in other fields know the damage that is being caused daily by the current housing crisis. Social workers in areas such as health, education, employment, mental health and family violence report that it is becoming increasingly difficult to improve outcomes in other areas of people's lives, because of their housing insecurity. This link is especially pertinent with respect to mental health: the most cost effective and enduring way to alleviate the anxiety of someone facing homelessness is to respond to their housing insecurity. Therefore, the AASW is anticipating that action to increase housing security will translate into savings in other sections of health and welfare spending.

Social Investment Budget Proposals:

- That the budget adopts the 5 strategies of the Everybody's Home Campaign to invest in secure, affordable housing for all.

3. Mitigating the inequalities of the climate emergency and preventing further climate related inequality

Although the climate emergency is affecting the entire population, it is becoming increasingly clear that the social, economic and health burden that this emergency creates is falling most heavily on people who are already disadvantaged, marginalised or vulnerable. AASW members observe that the people who are being hardest hit by this crisis are people on low incomes, renters, people experiencing poor health, people with a disability, people living with poor quality housing and infrastructure.

Therefore, the climate emergency is a social justice issue. There is a need for the government to take whatever action is possible to avoid the emergency deepening; to mitigate or contain consequences that can't be avoided; and to ensure that benefits and harm are distributed equitably. Current government policies fall short on all counts, and the coming federal budget provides an opportunity to address this with urgent, systemic and inclusive action.

Climate emergency Budget Proposals:

That the Federal budget invest significant funds to prevent, mitigate and respond to the climate emergency by:

- Re-directing current subsidies and investment from fossil fuels to initiatives which reduce the current and future health impacts and risks associated with increasing global temperature, sea level rise, and food and water insecurity.
- Funding and adopting a climate change policy which ensures that the costs associated with a changing climate are distributed equitably.
- Funding the retro-active adaptation of existing housing for renters and people on low incomes to control temperature more effectively, improve energy efficiency, decrease carbon emissions and boost the economy.
- Funding effective and sustainable adaptation responses by communities to the full range of health impacts linked to climate change.
- Update building codes to adopt and ensure sustainable and carbon neutral (or negative) design and materials.
- Providing incentive for local communities to coordinate local needs including use of micro-gridding, community farms and other localised systems.

C. Increased service capacity.

Social workers in the health sector and community organisations report that many areas of these services remain critically underfunded. The latest survey of the sector documents the increased demand in terms of both the numbers of people requiring assistance and the complexity of their needs.¹⁵ AASW members have highlighted the following areas as the most urgently requiring support.

1. Investing in the NDIS

The AASW welcomes the government's commitment to fully fund the NDIS. Nevertheless, the AASW is concerned that some recent policy proposals have appeared to have been designed with the intention of limiting access to the scheme. The AASW is concerned that the commitment to fully fund the plans of participants who are already in the NDIS should not be obtained at the expense of

¹⁵ ACROSS Meeting Demand in the shadow of the Delta Outbreak, 2021 <https://www.acoss.org.au/meeting-demand-in-the-shadow-of-the-delta-outbreak-community-sector-experiences/>, accessed 27/01/22.

granting more people access to the NDIS, or of the timely and competent administration of plans for current participants.

The AASW believes that the NDIS should no longer be conceptualised as a cost to the economy. The recent report from Per Capita demonstrates that the NDIS contributes more to economic growth than it costs.¹⁶ This is because it creates jobs for the people providing services to participants, and it enables participants to join the workforce and contribute to their community. The clear implication is that the budgetary allocation with respect to the NDIS should ensure that as many participants as possible receive the services which will enable them to contribute to the community and join the workforce.

Social workers nominate specific roles within the NDIS as central to achieving these goals, and are concerned that there is a shortfall in the number and quality of staff in these key roles. AASW members draw attention to the importance of Local Area Co-ordinators (LAC's), the staff who prepare, review and approve plans, and staff who provide complex support co-ordination. The AASW will continue to advocate that the pricing structure and level of remuneration for these services needs to be maintained at a level to ensure that they are undertaken in a timely manner by staff with appropriate skills and expertise.

Increased Service Capacity budget proposals:

- That the budget invest sufficient funds to the NDIS for timely and effective Local Area Co-ordination, planning and complex support co-ordination.

2. Funding for respite care and palliative care

The AASW has welcomed the findings of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety; and recognises that recent announcements of funding to improve the mental health of residents of aged care facilities will be an important improvement. Social workers who work with older people have nominated two related aspects of the service system which need improvement.

The first is in the treatment and care of people with dementia, and their families. The AASW recognises that the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has made more than a hundred recommendations for a complete overhaul of the structure, funding and governance of the system. In this context, the AASW recognises that improvements to the care of people with

¹⁶ Per Capita , False Economy: The economic benefits of the NDIS and the consequences of government cost-cutting, Per Capita, 2021, https://percapita.org.au/our_work/false-economy-the-economic-benefits-of-the-ndis-and-the-consequences-of-government-cost-cutting/, accessed 20/01/22.

dementia who are in Aged Care Facilities will be most effective if they are undertaken as part of the overall reforms proposed for that section of the system. The AASW calls on the government to proceed with the implementation of the Royal Commission's recommendations without further delay.

By contrast, many people with dementia are still being cared for at home. For these people, access to respite care is a necessary ingredient of their overall care arrangements as it relieves the burden on their family members. Social workers in all contexts encounter people who are providing unpaid or unrecognised care for a family member even where that person is receiving paid, formal care. Social workers have told the AASW that these family members have faced an added burden during the last 2 years, as paid care has been unpredictable and diminished. As a result, people providing unpaid informal care for people with dementia are turning to other services for help to cope with their own stress related mental health needs. The AASW believes that an immediate increase in the number of respite care places in the existing system will ease the burden on other mental health services.

The second area nominated by AASW members is the provision of palliative care. Although this is frequently assumed to apply exclusively to older people, this is not the case, and reform to this area can be undertaken independently of reform to the aged care system. Social workers have nominated an increase in at-home palliative care. A recent report has recommended that an additional \$365 million spent annually will enable more people to receive palliative care services in their home. As well as enabling each person and their family to experience the optimum amount of care in circumstances they choose, it will relieve demand pressure on existing services.¹⁷

Increased Service Capacity budget proposals:

- That the federal budget invest sufficient funds to enable the overhaul of the aged care system as recommended by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.
- That the budget invest sufficient funds to enable an increase in respite care for people with dementia to an amount that is double the current amount for the next financial year.
- That the budget invests \$365 million into palliative care services, to ease demand pressures on the health and aged care systems.

¹⁷ KPMG Palliative Care Australia, Investing to save: the economics of increased investment in palliative care in Australia, Palliative Care Australia, May 2020, <https://apo.org.au/node/305285>, accessed 27/01/22.

Appendix I

Pay parity analysis 2020-21 (Focused Psychological intervention, including COVID items)

| Item no | Item description | schedule fee for social workers (AUD\$) | Schedule fee for eligible psychologist (AUD\$) | Parity (AUD\$) | Number of sessions administrated by social workers in 20-21 ¹⁸ | Total parity (AUD\$) |
|---------|------------------------------------|---|--|----------------|---|----------------------|
| 80150 | 20-50 mins | 64.8 | 73.55 | 8.75 | 5,599 | 48,991.25 |
| 80151 | 20-50 mins telehealth | 64.8 | 73.55 | 8.75 | 1,244 | 10,885.00 |
| 80155 | 20-50 mins outside of consult room | 91.25 | 100.05 | 8.8 | 1,641 | 14,440.80 |
| 80160 | 50+ mins | 91.5 | 103.8 | 12.3 | 280,726 | 3,452,929.80 |
| 80161 | 50+mins telehealth | 91.5 | 103.8 | 12.3 | 15,399 | 189,407.70 |
| 80165 | 50 mins+ outside of consult room | 117.95 | 130.35 | 12.4 | 44,197 | 548,042.80 |

¹⁸ http://medicarestatistics.humanservices.gov.au/statistics/mbs_item.jsp

| | | | | | | |
|--------------|------------------------------|-------|--------|------|----------------|------------------|
| 80170 | 60+ mins group | 23.25 | 26.5 | 3.25 | 1,234 | 4,010.50 |
| 80171 | 60+ group telehealth | 23.25 | 26.5 | 3.25 | 117 | 380.25 |
| 91175 | 20-50 mins covid | 64.8 | 73.55 | 8.75 | 1,177 | 10,298.75 |
| 91176 | 50+ mins covid | 91.5 | 100.05 | 8.8 | 47,108 | 414,550.40 |
| 91187 | 20-50mins covid telephone | 64.8 | 73.55 | 8.75 | 2,841 | 24,858.75 |
| 91188 | 50+ mins covid telephone | 91.5 | 100.05 | 8.75 | 29,219 | 255,666.25 |
| Total | | | | | 430,502 | 4,974,462 |

*Since the introduction of the additional 10 sessions and the covid-19 telehealth items, the number of focused psychological intervention provided by social workers has increased by 10%, from 391,437 (2019-2020) to 430,502 (2020-21).

*The rebate for all Medicare items has been increased by 0.9% due to indexation on 1 July 2021. Therefore, parity will be subject to change. If the indexation factor remains at 0.9%, the parity in 21-22 and 22-23 would be adjusted to AUD \$5,019,232 and AUD 5,064,405 respectively.

Appendix II

School Social Work

The issue

Children and young people are struggling with the increased pressures and complexities of modern life, leading to poorer mental health and social outcomes. Research shows approximately three-quarters of common mental health problems emerge before the age of 25 and we continue to see young people reporting high levels of symptoms of mental ill health, with suicide being the leading cause of death for people aged 5-17 years old.¹⁹ This has only been compounded by the grief, isolation and challenges brought about by the Covid pandemic.

Childhood and adolescence are key stages of development and establishing the foundations for future wellbeing. It is vital children are well supported to navigate the challenges they face. This can come in different forms, including friends and family, but schools can play an important role in assuring students are receiving the support they need to thrive and meet their full potential.

What is school social work

School social workers are at the forefront in supporting students, schools, and families address complex social issues and have the specialist knowledge and skills necessary to ensure students remain connected and engaged in their learning. Using a whole-of-person and person-in-environment approach, school social workers assist students with a wide range of social, school, family and emotional issues that may impact on school engagement and learning, these include amongst others:

- Mental health issues
- Child abuse, trauma and neglect
- Bullying and anti-social behaviours
- Social relationships and supports
- Students in juvenile justice, out-of-home care
- Family violence
- Limited community and social supports
- Alcohol and other drugs
- Housing and transience

Why school social work

School social work goes beyond the immediate issue a student may present with to take a whole-of-person approach to their concerns and life situation. This can often uncover other issues that a student and/or their family is experiencing.

¹⁹ <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/research-areas/youth-mental-health/>

The Individual

Working with the individual, a school social worker can identify stressors that are impacting on the student's ability to engage with education and work with the student to work through these. Through this support the student can be assisted with strategies to tackle mental health issues, improving their close relationships and social network, and addressing barriers to learning. In this context a school social worker is also trained to pick up any signs of potential abuse or family violence impacting on the student.

The Family

With the student's consent, a school social worker is able to assist and support the family to engage with therapy and other family supports, navigate service systems such as housing, family violence and child protection, and assist with strategies for better communication between family members. This is in contrast to other professions such as counsellors or psychologists whose primary focus is the individual in their school environment.

The School Environment

Alongside issues facing young people in their homes and communities, school social workers can focus on the school's culture and environment to address bullying or remove barriers or inequities, and to develop safe and inclusive school communities which provide better futures for children.



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