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*Submission to Department of Social Services*

*Re: National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) - Code of Conduct*

**June 2017**

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Introduction

Who we are

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the professional body representing over 10,000 social workers throughout Australia.

We set the benchmark for professional education and practice in social work, and advocate on matters of social inclusion, human rights and issues that impact upon the quality of life of all Australians.

The social work profession

Social work is a tertiary-qualified profession recognised nationally and internationally. The social work profession is committed to the pursuit of social justice, the enhancement of the quality of life, and the development of the full potential of each individual, group and community in society. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are central to the profession and are underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and Indigenous knowledge. Social workers work with individuals, families and groups in numerous fields, including disability and the NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme). Social workers consider the relationship between biological, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual factors and how they impact on a person’s health, wellbeing and development. Accordingly, social workers maintain a dual focus in both assisting with and improving human wellbeing and identifying and addressing any external issues (known as systemic or structural issues) that may be having a negative impact, such as inequality, injustice and discrimination.

Our submission

The AASW welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to this consultation into the NDIS Code of Conduct.

Response

The AASW welcomes the advent of the NDIS as a rights-based approach that supports the independence and the social and economic participation of people with a permanent impairment or condition. The values of ‘choice and control’ that underpin the Scheme and the NDIS Code of Conduct are consistent with the values and principles of self-determination and empowerment that have guided the social work profession for many decades, as detailed in our professional Code of Ethics.[[1]](#footnote-1) Our Code specifically identifies the three core values that members of the social work profession are committed to including: Respect for persons, Social justice and Professional integrity

Professional social work skills and supports have historically been integral to disability services in both government and non-government organisations. Social workers have had a strong role in assessment, planning and case management across all types of disability and service provision. This has been due to our expertise in addressing both personal and systemic dimensions of support and intervention. Social workers focus on maintaining and enhancing quality of life in a range of settings to facilitate empowerment and assist people with disability, their families and communities. Our work includes all levels of management and program design, individual planning, counselling, coordination and case management, as well as policy development, research and advocacy. The values, qualifications and skills of social workers are strongly aligned with the person-centred approach of the NDIS. Social work practice is across the life span, and this includes working with children, adults, families, carers, groups and communities. Most importantly, social workers work alongside people with disability to facilitate their empowerment (and that of their families) and achieve their needs, goals and aspirations.

As such, the AASW welcomes and supports the development of the NDIS Code of Conduct. We believe that together with the relevant codes from professional associations, the introduction of an NDIS specific Code of Conduct is an important approach to ensuring the safety and quality of supports. As we have discussed in previous submissions on the issue[[2]](#footnote-2), we believe that greater regulation is needed to ensure safe and ethical service delivery, given the increase risk of abuse and neglect for people with disability.

The AASW supports the 9 main obligations as detailed in the Code and believe they provide a suitable foundation. As identified in the Discussion Paper, the NDIS Code of Conduct has strong parallels to our own code. We welcome and encourage the Commission to engage with professional bodies on its implementation and how to work together to limit duplication. Currently, there seems to be a lack of clarity as to how a breach of both Codes would be managed. This is an area that needs greater detail and attention to avoid repetition and confusion. Given our shared interest in safety and quality, we encourage the Commission to engage directly with professional bodies, like ourselves, to develop a clear framework and protocols.

Social workers have particular expertise on the complexities and dynamics of abuse. This includes being able to identify it and intervene. The AASW welcomes the focus of the Code on the prevention and identification of violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse, including the attention given to the training of staff. Given this is a key area of the Code, we believe much greater detail is needed to determine what constitutes “suitable supervision and training”. Our members report that this is inconsistently applied in other fields of practice, for example family violence and aged care, with a lack of clarity in relation to what constitutes an acceptable level of training. Furthermore, there is a significant absence of knowledge from the general workforce in the field in relation to the complex dynamic and circumstances that can contribute to abuse, including its varying manifestations beyond physical abuse. Training is central to identifying and preventing abuse, and we would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss this point further.

Should you wish the AASW to expand further on any of the responses here we would be very happy to do so.

Submitted for and on behalf of the Australian Association of Social Workers Ltd

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1. https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/1201 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.aasw.asn.au/social-policy-advocacy/by-issue/disability [↑](#footnote-ref-2)