

# Registration of Community Workers in Australia

Everything you need to know



*Community service workers practice under dozens of occupational titles across a range of fields but at some point all work with vulnerable people. The Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA) is the professional body for these workers and committed to promoting ethical and professional practice.*

## Registration in a nutshell

### For community workers

- An opportunity to highlight their professional standing, qualifications and police or security checks

### For clients and their families

- Confidence in knowing that workers have the qualifications, skills and experience to provide a quality service

### For employers

- Assurance that the qualifications of potential employees have been verified by an independent third party

### For the sector

- Recognition of the professionalism of workers and the importance of the services they provide

### For the wider community

- Certainty that there is a robust and transparent regulation system in place for regulating the sector

## Regulation of industry professionals

Doctors, dentists, engineers, accountants, nurses, therapists and taxi drivers are just some of the regulated professions in Australia. Many of these are compulsorily regulated, which means legislation makes it illegal to practice unless registered. Others are self-regulated where professional bodies and their members determine the educational and professional standards of practitioners.

No matter the type of regulation, it is always implemented to protect the public and ensure quality service, although often the positive spin off for the profession or trade itself is profound.

In Australia there are around 500,000 community workers with qualifications ranging from Certificate III through to a higher degree. Practitioners work under dozens of occupational titles but at some point all work with vulnerable people.

The protection of the public and providing quality service is paramount however, it is not mandatory for community workers to be registered.

In 2012 ACWA began to consider the merits of a national registration system for these workers. A consultation paper was developed and feedback from practitioners and those in the sector was gathered and analysed.

The result was overwhelming - 93% of survey respondents supported some form of regulation. Respondents said registration will 'make minimum knowledge, standards, competencies and ongoing professional development... key in the profession' and raise the 'standards of [the] sector and work'.

ACWA concluded that the experience, qualifications and diverse skills of community service practitioners, no matter their occupational title, should be recognised and protected through regulation, and made a sector priority.

## The path to registration

Due to the lengthy nature of compulsory regulation which can take decades to get up and running, and the potential for added layers of red tape to tie up workers, it was determined that ACWA would proceed with a self-regulation system that is responsive to workforce and community needs and also best suits the needs of the profession.

It was determined that crucial to any registration system is the support of potential employers as well as practitioners. With such a vast workforce, and an ever growing demand for services, it is necessary to provide the community, clients and their families, and potential employers with the opportunity to satisfy themselves that the workers in whom they invest so much trust are who they say they are; have a genuine qualification; and have agreed to work to a code of ethics.

This led to the second stage of the consultation process whereby ACWA put together a proposal on how the registration system could work. Face-to-face consultations were organised with employers, local government, state government departments, the union and other professional associations. Using this additional feedback from the industry, the development and launch of Australia's Community Workers Register took place.

## Community Workers Register

The register provides practitioners with the opportunity to highlight their qualifications, practicing level and police/working with children checks. The register is also open access so employers, carers and clients can access information regarding a specific worker and verify that they have a genuine qualification.

In order to reduce red tape, duplication and cost concerns, ACWA members (who have already had their skills assessed) are able to add their details to the register for free.

All registered workers are assigned a professional level which is visible on their listing.

Professional Level 1 (PL1) - these community workers are full members of ACWA who have a relevant qualification at a minimum of a diploma level and appropriate professional experience.

Professional Level 2 (PL2) - these community workers are provisional members of ACWA who have a relevant qualification at a minimum of a diploma level and are in the process of gaining appropriate professional experience.

Professional Level 3 (PL3) - these community workers have a relevant certificate III or IV level qualification.

## Inclusiveness of the Register

During the registration development project it was decided to include certificate III & IV workers on the register. Whilst these workers do not hold the same qualifications as ACWA members and are not eligible for membership, they do work with the same client groups.

Feedback from the consultations clearly indicated that there is public support for a register that includes this group of workers. Many groups that were consulted identified the gap in public information where the credentials of a worker can be checked. Family members of older people felt this particularly strongly when considering that elderly parents who were receiving HACC services were, in their experience, inviting virtual strangers into their homes.

Many others said that with the advent of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), a register would be a very useful tool when identifying qualified support workers.

**Overall, community workers provide essential and important services to the community. If you are a Community Worker you should be registered too! Go to [www.acwa.org.au](http://www.acwa.org.au) for details or to search the register.**