

Your submission said that Every day AASW members identify gaps in the service system and inequities in social policy which amount to breaches of the human rights of the vulnerable people they work with. Is there any way for you to formally report these like a feedback mechanism?

Dear Senator Thorpe

Thankyou for your question.

When we said that social workers observe breaches of human rights every day, some of these instances occur in contexts, such as the NDIS, or the Aged Care systems which contain avenues for complaint. Our members do indeed use these avenues but frequently find that they are inadequate for either ending the abuses, or preventing them from happening again. We have made multiple submissions to the relevant inquiries for improving these mechanisms, but they remain unsatisfactory in terms of preventing human rights breaches. The consultations that the NDIA held into quality and safety within the NDIS are a good example.

What is more worrying is that most human rights breaches occur in contexts where there exists no such mechanism for social workers to take any action. Many of the vulnerable and marginalised people with whom social workers work are involved in multiple systems. The harms these people experience are not the result of the systems not working but of the way they interact. For example: people forced to survive on Jobseeker cannot afford to fill their prescriptions for their mental health medication so they are not good tenants and end up being evicted into homelessness. Now in that instance, the low rate of jobseeker is inadequate for fulfilling the right of that person to the nutrition, secure housing and health services which they need. They have a right to the services necessary for their health and that right is clearly not currently being fulfilled. Having said that, there is currently nor body whose job it is to respond to that situation. I hope that this answers your question.

Warm regards,

Angela Scarfe.