

A recent ABC investigation of a sex offender who reportedly misrepresented his qualifications and suitability to work with young people, allegedly breaching the data of dozens of vulnerable young clients and using it to groom a victim, highlights the need for our systems and procedures to better protect the most vulnerable members in our society.

Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Chief Executive Cindy Smith said the story on 'The 7:30 Report' (7 June) is an unfortunate example of system failures which have exposed young people to risk.

"This case underscores the importance of a thorough regulatory process that is rigorous and stringent to ensure that only appropriately qualified, registered and the most suitable people are employed for these crucial roles of trust."

Ms Smith said that as the professional body representing qualified social workers in Australia, it is important that the AASW continually emphasise the advantages of, and the need for a proper registration scheme, to both government and the general public.

"Social workers work with people at their most vulnerable and the safety, health and wellbeing of the people we work with will always be the driving force behind the work of our members."

"Unfortunately, at the moment there are no mechanisms to prevent someone from calling themselves a social worker when they do not actually hold a social work qualification."

"Comparable countries such as the UK, USA, New Zealand, Ireland and Canada have long recognised the complexity of social work and have regulatory schemes for social workers. It is a genuine concern to our members, and should be to the broader public, that social work is not a registered profession and this is something that must change."

Ms Smith said a Bill is expected to be introduced into the South Australian Parliament later this year to develop specific legislation for the statutory registration of social workers.

"When this legislation is introduced it will significantly improve the quality and safety of social services in the South Australian community by establishing processes to confirm the qualifications of social workers working with people in vulnerable situations. Hopefully it will have a ripple effect and be replicated in every state and territory in the near future," she said.

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