



# The West Australian Social Worker

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

AN IMPORTANT DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE WA BRANCH

### A DECISION IN OPPOSITION TO THE FUNDING PROPOSAL FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Wednesday, April 4, 2001 was a very important day in the life of the WA Branch. That day marked the General Meeting held by the Branch to discuss the funding proposal circulated by the National Board concerning the way finances and other key processes would be managed by the Association. Nearly 60 members participated in the meeting including attendance from members from three separate regional areas who attended by telelink. As Branch President I was filled with both pride and emotion as I experienced members, many of whom are not part of either the Committee of Management or any of the Branch's sub committees, come together for an open and frank discussion concerning the future of the Association at a National and Branch level.

To begin the meeting, the process by which the meeting would be conducted in line with the rules established in Renton was set out. Renton sets out meeting procedures which the Association has adopted as its official guidelines for meetings.

To start the meeting, a letter was read out that has been sent by the National President and which you would have each received personally by this time. It is noted that the Green Paper circulated in the National Bulletin indicated that it was discussing "the framework of the funding model that the Board has decided upon" and how it could be implemented (page 4 of the Green Paper), while the National President's letter is not so clear if the Green paper is THE model or not as she indicated that "we need input from members to help us give it (the model) substance and to find or create the best model we can ...".

Debate was long and intense, open and honest, with every member who wished to state their position having the opportunity to do so as well as having a right of reply to subsequent comments once everyone had had their first turn to comment.

Discussion focused on the passion and commitment which members have to the Association, the profession and to the Branch. Regardless of the outcome of the current proposal from the National Board, the process has, I believe, resulted in drawing members closer together and given them the opportunity to reflect on what the Association, the profession and the Branch means to them.

It was clear that the Branch is seen as the key focus for members. While acknowledging the vital role played by the Association at a National level, the common sentiment expressed

by members was a concern that the balance between Branch and National has become skewed and that there was concern that the current proposal would result in: a loss of autonomy by Branches, the inability to provide services to members, and a cumbersome process whereby Branches would have to compete against one another for funding.

It was also felt that the proposed funding process would result in a loss of flexibility at the Branch level to respond to local issues, members' needs and local priorities in a timely fashion.

While a few members participating in the discussion did not appear to share this view, less than ten of the 60 members by vote, the overwhelming sense of the meeting was that equity and access for small Branches could be achieved more effectively some other way than by the proposal set forward in the paper that had been circulated to members by the National Board, and in a way that would not have the significant negative, unintended, consequences that the current proposal from the National Board appears to have for Branches and members at a local/Branch level.

Members were also concerned that the funding proposal would act as a disincentive to members, who are for the most part volunteers, in their attempt to raise income surplus at a Branch level. It was felt that if there was no assurance that surpluses so raised would actually remain with Branches and a commitment from the Board that these could be accessed by the Branch when the Branch COM felt it was appropriate to do so,

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An online version of this newsletter can be found at <http://westausasw.highway1.com.au/>

## THE WEST AUSTRALIAN SOCIAL WORKER

**Editor:** Greg Swensen ☎ 9483 8212 (W)

**Email:** g.swensen@student.murdoch.edu.au

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## WA BRANCH OFFICE

PO Box 198, West Perth, Western Australia 6872

☎ 9420 7240 Fax: 9310 3936

Email: [aaswwa@aasw.asn.au](mailto:aaswwa@aasw.asn.au)

Executive Officer: Meredith Doyle-Hafid

## NATIONAL OFFICE

PO Box 4956, Kingston ACT 2604

☎ 02 6273 0199 Fax: 02 6273 5020

Membership inquiries only (Freecall): ☎ 1800 630 124

<http://www.aasw.asn.au/>

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## AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS - WESTERN AUSTRALIAN BRANCH

### President

Barbara Meddin ☎ 9350 7221 (W)

### Secretary

Richard Wilkins ☎ 9371 0473 (W)

### Treasurer

Dawn Mielins ☎ 9022 0714 (W)

### Vice President (Ethics & Professional Practice)

Brian Dodds ☎ 9301 3648 (W)

### Vice President (Finance)

Norma Welsh ☎ 9881 0123 (W)

### Vice President (Social Policy)

Chris Coopes ☎ 9301 3898 (W)

### Vice President (Education)

Anne Pickard ☎ 9464 7062 (W)

### Committee Members

Pattie Benjamin ☎ 9381 9496 (H)

John de Jongh ☎ 9431 8800 (W)

Jennifer Hannan ☎ 9489 6363 (W)

Mary Joyce ☎ 9346 4666 (W)

Sarah Kemp ☎ 0408 944 188 (W)

Francis Lynch ☎ 9442 3444 (W)

Rosina Pruiti ☎ 9274 9411 (W)

Michelle Speed ☎ 9432 3333 (W)

### Representatives on External Bodies

#### Combined Health Professions Association

Representative: Mary Joyce ☎ 9346 4666 (W)

#### WA Council of Social Services

Representative: Chris Coopes ☎ 9301 3898 (W)

### Student Representatives

UWA: Vacancy.

Curtin: Vacancy.

ECU: Vacancy

### Convenors of Subcommittees

#### Administrators in Health Care

Convenor: Vere Berger ☎ 9346 4666 (W)

#### Aged Care

Co-Convenors: Penelope Mogridge ☎ 9346 6000 (W)

Ivy Vukovich ☎ 9334 3782 (W)

#### Childrens' Interests

Convenor: Beverley Woods ☎ 9382 0757 (W)

#### Continuing Professional Education

Convenor: Anne Pickard ☎ 9464 7062 (W)

#### Ethics

Convenor: John de Jongh ☎ 9431 8800 (W)

#### Kimberley/Pilbara Regional

Convenor: Lanie Pianta ☎ 08 9144 1111 (W)

#### Mental Health

Co-Convenors: Anthony Collier ☎ 9531 8080 (W)

Michele Speed ☎ 9431 3400 (W)

#### Professional Practice

Convenor: Mike Clare ☎ 9380 2998 (W)

#### South West Regional

Convenor: Rebecca Jury ☎ 08 9721 9788 (W)

#### State Conference

Convenor: Sarah Kemp ☎ 9527 8536 (W)

Project Officer: Marian Maughan:

☎ 9330 2585 (H)

fax: 9317 3891

**See Page 12 for details of  
Conference Scholarships**

then members/volunteers would cease to work to raise any surplus income.

The members present debated the following motion, which was passed with 41 in favour, 2 opposed and 2 abstentions.

*“As a duly constituted meeting of the Western Australian Branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers, we oppose the funding change proposal put forward by the National Board of the AASW”.*

Members were urged to forward the position of the Branch as their feedback to the National consultation. What was suggested is that the form supplied in the National Bulletin be returned reflecting this position along with any other comments a member might wish to make as part of the consultation.

If you have misplaced that form, it is my understanding that written comments without the form will be acceptable. The WA Branch executive officer can also supply you with a copy of the form circulated in the Bulletin. It would also be appreciated if members would provide the Branch with a copy of their response. Please note, elsewhere in this Branch newsletter are letters received by the Branch and myself concerning either the General Meeting or the funding proposal itself. Reading these may be of further assistance to those members who wish to provide a response to the National consultation.

It was also the opinion of the members at the General Meeting that the National Board should go back to square one, develop a range of options that could assist in providing equity and access for small Branches and members, especially in remote and isolated location but that would not result in a disproportion amount of funding going to National programs nor in pitting Branches against one another in a cumbersome, time-consuming process. There was also strong sentiment that any way of managing the Association's finances should not favour a centralised approach to management nor should Branches be prevented from accessing the surpluses that each Branch has accrued in order to provide services to members.

This is particularly important to Branches like the WA Branch who wish to access its reserves accrued by the hard work of members and the COM so that it can, for example, engage a social policy officer as well as support access by regional sub committees to the COM and other supports and services. It is noted that if the WA Branch cannot access its surpluses for yet a second year in a row, neither one of these priorities can be actualised.

While the National President's letter indicates that the Board has *“...decided on a fee increase so that the Branches still receive an adequate amount in the capitation to fund their programs and activities”*, it is the understanding of the WA Branch Committee of Management that this, as a part of the Associations *“interim financial model”* adopted by the Board that quarantines some costs before providing each Branch its capitation funds, will result in a significant decrease in the amount of capitation dollars that comes to the WA Branch and thus a concurrent reduction in Branch member services is likely to occur.

Membership services are likely to be curtailed at a Branch level as the Committee of Management feels that it is unlikely it will be able to raise that much additional income at a Branch level and at this month's COM we will have to decide what member services at a Branch level to cut.

Finally, members at the General meeting felt that any proposals developed by the National Board in regards to the management of the Association's finances should be a result of extensive consultation with Branches, Branch Committee of Managements and members themselves.

Thus, on behalf of the General Meeting of the Branch, you are urged to return your comments to National office for consideration by the National Board indicating your opposition to the proposed changes to the way the finances of the Association are managed and insist that the Association manage its finances in a way that supports services to members at a Branch level and allows Branches the autonomy they need to provide quality services to its membership at the Branch level. There was no doubt by those present at the General Meeting that this could be achieved in an equitable way both for all Branches and for National programs.

## WA Branch Special General Meeting 4th April 2001, 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm City West Lotteries House, West Perth

Chairperson: Dr Barbara Meddin, Branch President  
Minutes: Meredith Doyle-Hafid, Branch Executive Officer

### Present

Pippin Margaria, Bev Cranwell, Terry Phillips, Pattie Benjamin, Roma Lewi, Cindy Gorton, Anthony Collier, Winnie Dwyer, Phyllis Costello, Joan McKie (Derby), Mia Hayes, Liz Retamal, Richard Wilkins, Vere Berger, Fiona Denman, Amanda Sinclair, Wade Sinclair (Student Associate member \*), Lynn Selepak, Virginia Scott, Trish Langdon, Rae Lindsay, John Fussell, Noel Giblett, Greg Swensen, Tom Barrett, John de Jongh, Julie Roberts, Sue Chapman, David Woodroffe, Paddi Goome – Carroll, Lucinda Daly, Brian Wooller, Adam Johnson, Kanthi Perera, Anne Pickard, Marian Maughan, Paul Whelligan (Student Associate member \*), Sarah Kemp, Kurt Egan, Janine Hawker, Wendy Butler, Julie Dickinson, Brian Dodds, Sabina Leitman, Anne Barrett, Jan Sumner, Chris Coopes, Rosina Pruiti, Pat Carberry, Michele Speed, Chris Perriam, Erlene Chun, Libby Lloyd, Nic Hastings James, Shirley Kohn, Barbara Meddin, Meredith Doyle (\* = not counted in voting on motions)

### Present by phone link

Bunbury: Rebecca Jury, Pauline Meemaduma, Debbie Easter, Phil Cutting, Narrogin: Norma Welsh, Geraldton: Lou Tatasciore, Nambitha Madikiza, Anne Sweeney

### Apologies

Graham Chapman, Dawn Meilens, John Hodges, Helen Turbitt, Fran Crawford, Evyn Webster, Gail Elliott, Elena Cosentino, Chris Dwyer, Rob MacPherson, Liz Hodge, Anne Hawkins, Paddy Glasgow, Carolyn Johnston, Rachel Manley, Joe Calleja, Mary Joyce.

### Welcome

Members were greeted by the chairperson, Dr Barbara Meddin (Branch President) and a quorum declared – 63 voting members present.

Procedures for the meeting explained in detail by the Chair as the group was so large and others were telelinked. Each speaker to be allowed a first turn to speak before anyone could speak for a second time- other than point of clarification if needed.

### Business of the Meeting

(a) Letter from Jo Gaha, National President and Director read in its entirety by the Chair.

(b) The chair gave a summary of the events leading to the calling of the Branch General meeting today and the request

from National body to receive feedback on their funding model proposed and for branches to hold information forums.

The chair explained the reason/history for the need to review funding within the organisation. Points raised included: The paper was a result of the desire of the National Board to enhance equity of access to services by members, especially small branches, a way to fund all units of the association, and concern expressed about the federal body running on deficit spending.

What is replacing capitation as a funding model?; Model proposed by National body articulated in the green paper with February's Bulletin. National body has identified what they see as the essential costs associated with running the branches eg part time Executive Officer, these are to then be allocated to each branch, and then the branches are to submit requests for funds for extras eg State conference, regional sub-committees. All revenue raised to go to National body and will then be redistributed as the board sees fit eg CPE and State Conference monies will not necessary be returned to the state that raises them.

The chair then asked Pauline Meemaduma, as a National director and National Vice President to add to this explanation or clarify any points if she wished. Pauline then stated that her understanding was that the model was not articulated yet- that it was one idea and the National body was asking members views on this and other models. That National was asking members about their views of equity within the organisation.

It was necessary at this stage to refer Pauline and all members to pages 4 and 5 of Jo Gaha's letter in the February Bulletin - Green pages - to clarify the point about whether one model was being proposed before further discussion could proceed. This states:

*"The FRAMEWORK of the FUNDING MODEL that the board has decided on is as follows:*

*1. We would agree on a baseline of services to be provided to members...*

*2. All units would receive an allocation of funds in order to provide services ...*

*3. Member numbers will not be the sole defining variable...*

*4. Once the above costs are attributed the remaining monies would form the basis of project funds that would be tendered amongst branches or committees...each year...*

*...  
7. Branches would still be able to raise additional funds... These funds remain within the branch though when they may be spent may need to be determined by the priorities of the Association."*

It was also noted the questionnaire to be sent back only asks for comment in relation to this predefined model.

(c) Brian Wooller gave a history of the road to incorporation for the AASW having been closely involved on both state and National levels. These steps were detailed in the letter sent to members.

Brian re-iterated that historically the Association has kept autonomy within the branches and this is enshrined within the Constitution and the Branch by laws of the Association.

(d) Call for first comments from the floor

Members were given the opportunity to comment or ask questions for the first time. A summary of points raised were as follows:

\*A member expressed concern about centralisation of the Association to National Office and asked the Association and

membership to consider other models instead, such as, the Canadian model of Federation whereby the states would have relative autonomy whilst remaining affiliated with the National body for issues to be tackled on the National level.

\* Another member further referred to the National green paper as stating it was proposing a particular model- not open to others and asked what would happen to funds raised by the activities such as the state conference and the ongoing status of the Branch state conference.

\*A member thanked Brian Wooller for the history he gave and stated he was not in favour of Branches losing control of funds they raise and wants more detail about the proposed model before he could give a considered response to National's proposed model.

\*Member stated the model appeared to give no recognition of costs associated with encouraging Remote/rural participation and was a disincentive to Branches to raise other funds. She also stated that given National Office was increasing fees the funding cut back to WA was even higher than that suggested by the CEO in the coming financial year under the interim proposals suggested.

\*Member stated she felt the current model was not necessarily working or the best and we need a new model.

\*Member stated he considered the questionnaire calling for comment is based on assumptions about the proposed model being accepted and was therefore flawed as it didn't allow for consideration of other models of funding. He was concerned about the financial accountability of the National body currently therefore had no faith in further monies and control being handed over to the National body. There was currently no training for the BEC's and given the outcome of recent court cases this caused considerable concern about the implementation of policies by the National body.

\*Member was concerned that we maintain a national profile and cohesion and that the National body enables the profession to speak on a National level and thought there may be other ways of meeting the current concerns about financial difficulties.

\*Member said she felt the questionnaire was asking for comments from individual members rather than the Branches

\*Member stated that all of us agree to access and equity but that this was not an issue about those principles and we needed to look to the real issues. She stated that other professional organisations functioned quite well with having Incorporated state branches and a Federated structure eg Law Society etc. She stated she felt the National body was important but that it was possible for the Branches to operate as their own entity and be affiliated with the National body through a range of other models.

\*Member stated she considered that our National directors were our representatives and it was okay for them to direct spending as this is what we had elected them for and had given them power to do.

\*Member stated she felt that in the country it was hard to access support from the state body let alone a National body that would possess even more control than now. She felt the country was being left out of the process

\*Another member (member presented on another's behalf as was unable to attend) disagrees also with the proposed model. Is in favour of the states retaining their autonomy as much as possible but remaining linked with the National organisation.

## South West Subcommittee

### Meeting Dates for 2001

4 pm, Boardroom, Edith Cowan University (Bunbury campus)

8 May	11 September
12 June	9 October
10 July	13 November
14 August	11 December

\*Member stated he felt the whole process was questionable as the parameters of the questions in the questionnaire were too limited and controlled the response. He did not agree with the concept of tendering for our own funds back and felt the questionnaire had a lack of clear direction.

\*Member agrees with the principles of access and equity but reminded the branch and the national body that it is the member volunteers that in the end make the programs, CPE etc work not the part-time administrative staff and despite the principle of equity if the branch has very few members it will not be possible to deliver the same level of basic services as the volunteer member base is not there.. Member also endorsed previous speakers comments.

\*Another member also endorsed previous speaker's comments and wanted more detailed guidelines about who made the decisions and what they are going to do with the responses when they get them. Who makes the decision?

It was clarified at this point that amendments to the constitution would be put to the AGM in November 2001.

\*Member stated she was concerned about the remoteness from decision makers in a highly centralised system and wanted the control to remain within the state as although remoteness was also an issue within the state it was at least more accessible than on a national level.

\*Member stated she couldn't understand why National needed such a large amount of money.

Pauline Meemaduma stated - she was concerned about the discussion taking on a us versus them approach. Discussed jointly with the Chair what the National body spends money on, eg legal cases, enquiries, recognising O/S qualifications, Accreditation of courses, responding to policy National Bulletin, Journal, Deliberations of the board, Insurance

\*Member asked if there were other meetings like this occurring in other Branches? It was stated that to the Directors knowledge two other Branches were having meetings.

The chair asked if there were any further first comments from the floor. There were none.

(e) Call for second comments from the floor

The following motion was put:

*"This properly constituted meeting of the Australian Association of Social Workers Western Australian Branch asks its Committee of Management to explore alternative means to legally protect the Branch's autonomy"*

Moved: Brian Wooller Seconded: Patti Benjamin

Brian Wooller spoke to the motion. He asked that the members

ask that we look at how the branch can hold control over its own activity and financial situation.

Greg Swensen spoke in favour of the motion stating that he considered the Branch should look at alternative models for structure/ identity/ autonomy for the branch with a framework that permits connection with the National body.

Speakers against the motion were called for; Pauline Meemaduma stated she felt caution was necessary and counselled the members to remember that it was the members that had been asked for their comments rather than the Branch or COM.

Those in favour: 51, opposed: 4, abstentions: 3 (2 student associates were unable to cast a vote). **The motion was carried.**

\*Member asked to make his first comment: He stated his concern that the branch had recently been unsupported by National office when the branch asked to employ a Social Policy Officer eventhough we had the funds to trial this pilot project for a year as proposed. He stated he considered it was now necessary to look at other ways to fund National rather than the proposed model by National.

Brian Wooller referred to past history of supporting the incorporation process to enable protection for members and the Directors and that he has always been a supporter of a National Body however he re-iterated this had always been subtitled by the provision that Branch autonomy would remain the underlying principle. He stated he was against the current model and had felt it important that due to his past position that it was necessary to subdue his comments until this point of the meeting in order for the members of the meeting to not be unduly influenced by his views.

He expressed his concern that the model proposed would take autonomy away from the Branches and centralise all the control at the National body thus distancing the Association further from members and distancing members from the decision making of the Association. He was concerned that financial responsibility was not evident at the National level and WA had had to deal with its own financial crisis without assistance from the National body with the Executive Officer taking a pay cut by means of reduced hours and the Branch having a very tight budget for some years. He was concerned that WA may now have to pay for the National body's financial problems.

At this point Barbara Meddin vacated the Chair and Chris Coopes took on the role as Chair of the meeting

Barbara Meddin stated she was expressing her personal view as a member and that given her position within the organisation felt it necessary to withhold comment until this late stage in the meeting to permit members to express their views freely and not be unduly influenced by her own view. She stated that as a Board member and chair of the meeting it was important to remain impartial and balanced in her presentation to the meeting.

However as a private member Barbara Meddin then stated that she had expressed concern about this model in the Board meeting and understood she was voting to accept the discussion paper be distributed with the Bulletin for members to comment rather than voting to support the model itself.

Barbara Meddin explained to the meeting the reasons why she opposed the proposed model.

Barbara Meddin considered it was a disincentive to the members at a state level to be involved, raise money and provide ongoing CPE events- when the Branch had been in the red a few years back everyone had pitched in and raised money including

selling raffle tickets at the state conference. This had resulted in the Branch now being in a comfortable financial position.

This proposed model would pit one branch against another in order to get money for “projects” and would particularly disadvantage a remote branch such as WA. It would also give too much power to National to decide how the Branch could spend its money which our recent experience of National rejecting our proposal for a Social Policy Officer had so strongly pointed out- this rejection came about despite the branch being able to fund the position from its reserves and the branch having worked to this stated goal over many years.

Barbara Meddin expressed her concern that in the recent interim proposed changes for the coming financial year WA branch would experience a decrease in amount of funds received from capitation in the coming year (by the CEO’s calculations) a significant amount. The recent Branch strategic planning day had identified its priority to be to include the rural and remote members in more decision-making and venues for policy input but now all funding would have to be reviewed in the light of the significant cut WA faced even though we funded most of our own activities.

Chris Coopes vacated the Chair and Barbara Meddin then resumed the Chair of the meeting.

A member stated she was concerned about the governance of the organisation and skills of directors given the current financial deficit and was concerned that the Directors needed to be knowledgeable about balanced spending. She felt this meant if the Directors were elected properly they should be able to financially manage the organisation.

Another member then put a motion to the meeting.

*“As a duly constituted meeting of the Western Australian Branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers we oppose the funding change proposal put forward by the National Board of the AASW”.*

Moved: Rosina Pruiti Seconded: Chris Coopes  
Those in favour: 41, opposed: 2, abstained: 2.  
**The motion was carried.**

The following motion was also put:

*“As a duly constituted meeting of the WA Branch of the Australian Association of Social Workers, the board be asked to examine a range of models including the current process as the basis for funding Branches and National programs taking into account access and equity issues- a range then to be presented to the full membership for their consideration”*

Moved: Rosina Pruiti Seconded: Chris Coopes  
Those in favour: 41, opposed: 1, abstained: 1  
**The motion was carried.**

PM stated that members should remember that if they request this of National and they follow this request then the outcome would then have to be accepted by the members of the Branch.

No one chose to speak further to the motion either in favour or against

Barbara Meddin then thanked all members for attending and for their full and frank discussion and declared the meeting closed.

Meeting closed at 7:30 pm

## New Members

The WA Branch welcomes the following new members:

Deborah Allen Student  
Carrina Bradbury Student  
Gianna Cavalli  
Anne Deck Newly moved to WA  
Patsie Gubler Student  
Cliff Holmes New Graduate  
Heather Hugo  
Dawn Lamperd Family and Childrens Services  
Janette McDonagh CLAN  
Casey Neave Student  
Geoffrey Perks My Place  
Luana Rocchiccioli New Graduate  
Christine White Family and Childrens Services

## Responses Received to the WA Branch Special General Meeting 4th April 2001

Hi Barbie

I would just like to thank you for the opportunity to hear the informed and eloquent opinions of members regarding the funding restructure proposal put forward by the national body at the meeting last night. I hope that as a result of attendance of members and the subsequent word of mouth that is likely to follow that the WA Branch is able to give a clear message to the national body about this important issue.

**Fiona Denman**

Hi Barbie

Just a quick “hello” to say how well last night’s meeting went! I thought you did a brilliant job of chairing and were neutral and even-handed. No-one could criticise your well-balanced approach, and I hope that your efforts are perceived in a positive light by others, including the Directors.

Hope you were pleased with the outcome. Thanks for your continued efforts on behalf of all members

**Lynn**

Hi Barbie

I have been thinking more about “our” AASW after the meeting last night. Having the time to participate and know what the AASW is all about has been quite difficult. Wade and I attended the meeting last night as we could feel the urgency in Brian’s letters to AASW WA Branch members.

Though I can also see the benefits of having a National body I was also heartened to hear the individuals who shared of their vision and passion for the work of the AASW in Western Australia. I must say that it was really good to hear those

who have thought long and hard about the recommendation of the National Board.

I believe that my attending the meeting last night has given me a much better understanding of why I am a member of the AASW and the many people who contribute so much of their own time to see the AASW doing well here in WA.

I also appreciated the way Brian and yourself handled yourselves in not wanting to say too much from the beginning and be seen to be dictating to the members what to do.

I feel that I now have a duty to complete the green form and ensure that our voices are heard. I also believe that it is my responsibility to engage other Social Workers in discussing the current events.

**Amanda Sinclair**

To the Directors of AASW

### **Re The Funding Discussion Paper**

This is a general response to the Funding Discussion Paper. I am extremely disappointed that the majority of the Directors have supported this document and the Board decisions that have led to it. I am aware of the detail provided by the President and the CEO in recent issues of the National Bulletin and the concerns expressed by some members. I appreciate that the issues are complex and a simplistic response to the Funding Discussion Paper can be discounted. However, the structure of the Association has led us to an ever increasing centralisation of its governance which is inappropriate for an Australian professional association.

This Discussion Paper is a deceptive document which clothes its real purpose with statements about equity and access. It appears that the Board is desperately trying to overcome the results of pursuing an over ambitious level of activity over recent years. This proposed new funding formula seeks to have total control over the funds of the Branches. Branches have an increasing capability to generate funds in a way that the national office can never achieve. Take away the incentive to generate funds by the Branches and the Association will become the poorer.

The amount and range of services that a National Office of a professional association can give to its members is very limited. To suggest that a wealthier National Office could provide better services to a social worker in Broome or Mackay is a nonsense. Branches are the only means of providing realistic professional support to rural social workers. An example in Western Australia is funding remote social workers to attend our Annual State Conference.

The Directors would be well advised to look at other professional associations and how they are structured and financed. They would find that there are notable examples of federated structures whereby the State Branches are incorporated bodies that control all their funds rendering an agreed proportion to the National body. Our present structure dictates central financial control and your current proposals leads to even greater centralisation. In any nationwide association there will be tensions about how finances should be apportioned but vigorous State Branches are the lifeblood of professional associations. If responsibility for raising and distributing funds is centralised Branches will gradually cease to generate funds.

Point 7 on Page 4 of the Discussion Paper is an indication of the real threat to the financial health of the Association. It is stated, "Branches would still be able to raise additional funds as

## **Social Work Day Breakfast In Bunbury 17 May 2001**

7.30 am - 9.00 am

at Parade Hotel, Austral Parade Bunbury, \$13.50 per head

This is an opportunity to enjoy a lovely breakfast with other social workers to celebrate our profession.

**RSVP by 10 May 2001**

Tracey Turner 08 9727 2330

Rebecca Jury 0409 085 565

*they see fit and/or opportunities arise. These funds will remain with the branch though when they may be spent may need to be determined by the priorities of the Association." A Branch is unlikely to raise funds if it can't spend these funds at its own discretion.*

There are historical reasons for the way in which the Association has developed. It has progressed very well in spite of, rather than because of its structure. In this time of reassessment, would it not be better to have a radical rethink rather than building further upon a flawed model.

The Discussion Paper presents one model and members are asked to respond to questions which appear to have an underlying assumption that some form of this model will be acceptable. The members should not be presented with one model with the expectation that they will agree to it. More than one way forward should be canvassed. I sincerely hope that it will become apparent that the Directors have made some very poor decisions and that the membership will not support these decisions.

**Roma Lewi (Life Member)**

Dear Barbara

Following the WA Branch Special Meeting of the AASW on 4 April 2001 I had a little more time to reflect upon how I felt about the Questionnaire sent to all AASW members. I was a little sad that the National Board of the AASW that has such great ideals as participation and inclusion (and has so recently worked on a 'Code of Ethics') could miss the mark with their treatment of members.

My personal ideal is to see that the work done by WA Branch members will primarily benefit our WA Branch members, particularly opening up opportunities for participation of those in remote locations.

Thank you once again for representing WA Social Workers and our interests at the national level.

I was also conscious of how our colleagues in Bunbury might be feeling after the meeting on 4 April 2001 and I hope we continue to work at hearing each and every concern raised at our Branch Meetings.

**Wade Sinclair**

To: AASW Board of Directors  
From: Joe Calleja, WA Branch Member  
Date: 18 April 2001

**Re: Proposed new funding formula and constitutional changes**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on your proposal to change capitation and the related changes to the constitution of the AASW. I write to indicate my opposition to your proposals. This is based on:

- my understanding of the history of the AASW;
- inconsistencies in your arguments; and
- your proposed timeframe.

I make these comments in good faith and on the understanding that the Board is engaged in a genuine process of consultation.

### History

I was the President of the WA Branch when the AASW was incorporated as a national association in the ACT in 1989. I signed the papers that resulted in the loss of incorporation of the WA Branch to allow the formation of the National AASW as an entity which incorporated all branches across Australia.

The AASW went through a long and careful process Australia wide in considering its incorporation as a single entity registered in the ACT. As the WA Branch President, I had to advise the Committee of Management of the WA Branch to endorse the removal of the incorporated status of the Branch as a decision that would not compromise the Branch operations. I was satisfied that the Branch would not be compromised and that it would serve both Branch and National interests in making this decision.

I supported the move because:

the Company structure was intended to be a vehicle by which the objects of the Association could be achieved, rather than as being the driver of the Association; and

the By Laws of Branches were intended to undertake roles and activities that would allow it to meet member needs.

From 1992 to 1996 I was National Vice President of the AASW, for the last two years as National Treasurer. I assumed that responsibility with the understanding of the relationship between Branches and the National body as articulated in the above principles.

I believe the current proposal by the Board goes against the spirit of what the 1989 Board Directors entered into in the creation of the AASW as a national body registered in the ACT.

### Inconsistencies of Argument

There are several inconsistencies in the paper presented to members for consideration. These include:

The history of conflict surrounding the issue of capitation is considered in some depth in the paper as a reason for placing less reliance on capitation and more reliance on central decision making. Somehow the same logic is not applied in relation to dealing with the two additional branches that exist within NSW and Queensland. : One needs to question whether these Branches should be abolished as keeping them on the basis of history is inconsistent with citing history as the reason to deal with capitation.

The paper indicates that the current approach to capitation has not been a functional system in recent years. The Board has not indicated whether it believes that the significant

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deficits it has incurred the three past financial years is a product of a dysfunctional capitation system, or the product of poor planning.

I was a National Vice President in 1992 when the WA Branch went into temporary 'receivership' for living beyond its means. The National Board castigated the Branch for over expending its resources and was clear in its direction to other Branches that they had to live within their means. This meant that income from capitation and whatever reserves a Branch had was all it could rely on financially.

I recall that, as the National Treasurer, I also had to go to the SA and Victorian branches because they looked as though they were about to live beyond their means. These were difficult negotiations, yet the National body appears to act with impunity these days in living beyond its means having had three successive years of deficit funding of services. It now seems to be asking membership to allow a change in capitation to enable it to balance the books, while using the argument that this will somehow promote access and equity.

It would seem more logical that if the Board was genuinely concerned with access and equity it would explore the option of attaching conditions to Branch capitation to achieve those goals. For example, it could require Branches to demonstrate how they have served members in regional areas or members who have retired from the work force for family reasons, in order to receive their full payment of capitation.

### Proposed Time Frame

I have serious reservations about the timeframes proposed. I do not believe that the National Board can make responsible recommendations on changes to the constitution by November 2001. I believe a minimum of 12 months is required to allow for informed consultation by the membership.

I base my judgement on the following reasons:

(a) If the Board believes the changes are necessary for the benefit of members, then members need to see the results of their feedback in a form that outlines how the changes will benefit them. Although this will prolong the process it ensures that members are given the opportunity to make informed decisions.

Without wishing to be disrespectful to the Board, it is presumptuous of the Board to suggest that it have been entrusted to make these decisions on its own. There are clear precedents for such consultations on matters such as Self-Regulation, Competencies and CPE that involved much more consultation than the Board is proposing.

The fact here is that the Board is asking its membership to trust it with their money in proposing a radical change to the

capitation formula. I would have thought that it would have proposed a consultative process that was more comprehensive than it has outlined.

From a personal perspective as a member, I do not have confidence in the Board for it to make decisions along the lines proposed without first having had the opportunity of reading feedback provided by fellow members and recommendations arising from that feedback. I say this particularly in light of the poor financial performance of the National programs over the past three years.

(b) The timeframe provided would not seem to allow sufficient capacity for the Board to assess its ability to adequately service regional areas on CPE. CPE is one of the benefits it has cited. The previous National CPE strategy for regional areas failed and has not been resurrected in any other form.

I cannot see how the Board can argue it is in a better position to serve regional areas better than Branches when it has no track record of success on this issue. The Board should articulate its vision in a paper for further consideration by the membership.

(c) The Board cites delivery of services such as the Journal and National Bulletin as further examples of benefits that will accrue from the changes proposed. These services have traditionally been provided under the existing capitation system. If there are changes proposed that would be derived from the new capitation model, these should be outlined in a paper for further consideration by the membership.

(d) By implication, the Board is indicating that the changes proposed would result in improved planning and service delivery throughout Australia. I believe the proposal itself is poorly planned and argued and the timeline proposed is inadequate.

Unfortunately, I saw similar problems in budget papers that were presented to the Board at its June 2000 meeting, where I was present as an observer for the WA Branch. These two experiences lead me to believe that, as a member, I would be wise to expect the Board to provide further documentation for consideration before I cast a vote on such an important issue.

### Conclusion

It is my view, as an AASW member, and as a previous member of the National Executive, that the Board is asking the membership to consider a fundamental change to the operation of the AASW without affording the membership with a reasonable opportunity to consider the issues.

I believe the Board needs to expand the time frame suggested and provide the membership with a discussion paper that provides detailed recommendations, which outline how the new funding arrangement will work for members.

To do otherwise is to ask the membership to place a degree of trust in the Board that is unrealistic, in my opinion, given the magnitude of the decisions expected of the AASW membership.

*Joe Calleja*

# The Art of Social Work

The State Conference Planning Committee is considering an exhibition at this year's conference of art works produced by local social workers.



We would like to hear from anyone interested in contributing their art work, including paintings, drawings, photography, ceramics, prints, textiles, etc.

If you like this idea and/or have something to contribute please call

**Adam Johnson, 0411 307 640 or email: adamjohnson@one.net.au.**

## SOCIAL WORK DAY 16TH MAY 2001

Celebrate your Profession, your selves and your colleagues

Its not too late to get involved in Social Work Day!  
Celebrate within your community, work or area.

We have "party packs"(Posters, stickers etc) available for anyone holding an event so just call us for information, packs, ideas, events happening in your area.

### Contact:

**Norma Welsh normaw@fcs.wa.gov.au**

**Meredith Doyle 08 9420 7240**

**aaswwa@aasw.asn.au**

or to obtain Party Packs directly contact National Office on (02) 6273 0199.

# Rethinking Social Policy in Western Australia Thoughts for A New Agenda

by Emeritus Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya AM  
Hon. Senior Research Fellow, University of Western Australia

Given that social changes of the past two decades have created new inequalities (e.g., energy, poverty due to lack of heating facilities), the nature and scope of social policy can no longer be restricted to the social services, and welfare provisions as in the conventional 'welfare state' (confined to the Big Five: Health, Education, Housing, Social Security, and Personal Social Services). As one social policy theorist puts it, the restriction of welfare to 'welfare state services' is 'an impoverished one'. If social policy is to focus on the time honoured theme of inequality, it is imperative we consider new inequalities, characteristic of the new economy and the post-industrial society.

This requires that we examine how the new economy and consequent social changes have brought to the fore issues of equity and access in such areas such as transport, work, communications, shopping, and public utilities (water and heating). Thus, many social analysts have shown how transport is an important generator of new social inequalities and also how citizenship has been replaced by consumerism as a source of identity and personal satisfaction. The former has been recently well illustrated by the community anger about petrol prices.

Consequently, many of the inequalities we encounter have to do with such facets of social life as poor transport, trading hours for shopping, and vulnerable urban facilities (e.g., dangerous streets with poor lighting, etc.). The consumer society of the new age of information technology presents challenges for rethinking the nature and form of social policies – policies that continue to address the central issue of redressing inequalities arising from the diswelfares of rapid social change, the causalities of social progress. Addressing questions of inequality and distributive justice, however, has never been a priority for conservatives (see e.g., Tony Abbott 'Don't bleat, take your medicine', in The Australian March 21) for whom what is important is to strengthen the enterprise culture based on deregulation and privatization, and enhance individual choice, all of which diminish the public sector and the role of the state in redressing inequalities, and ensuring more equitable outcomes for all citizens.

Following Cahill,<sup>1</sup> and others, it is important to recognize that governments, especially social democratic governments, may need to intervene more than in the recent past if they are to address the new social inequalities of the post modern era of global capitalism. A critical concept for addressing new social inequalities is that of 'social exclusion'. This stands in contrast to some versions of New Labour theorising which sees social inclusion as a replacement for social equality.<sup>2</sup> Social exclusion is best defined as 'the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live' (European Foundation 1995). Thus, exclusion entails different pathways for individuals. For

example, there may be persons who become unemployed as victims of market greed, whose marriage breaks up, a recent migrant or refugee or one who because of lack of appropriate education has no security of employment.

To overcome social exclusion and to redress these sorts of inequalities, we need to think laterally about new forms of intervention to safeguard the public interest, such as regulatory devices and structures to ensure public accountability and community participation. Indeed, in tackling social exclusion, participation, meaning citizen participation, understood as full and equal membership in the political community for all citizens. Provided that the notion of 'community' is understood as being heterogeneous and differentiated; it may well be the watchword for the new portfolio of 'community development' in the new WA Gallop Labor government.

In this regard it may also be useful to revisit the community based notion of regional social planning in the Australian Assistance Plan (AAP) of the Whitlam era.<sup>3</sup> It is especially important that 'community development' should not become too narrowly associated with the Family and Children Services of the past; nor with any idyllic notions of community as espoused by some utopian social theorists. Equally community participation must not become a surrogate for 'mutual obligation' of citizens, the slogan of new conservative social theorists and New Labour in the UK.<sup>4</sup> (Lister 2000). On the contrary, in a rights based democracy, duties and obligations flow from rights and entitlements and not vice versa.

Conservative governments have, by and large, attempted to devalue the contract between the state and the citizens and lay greater emphasis on the duties of citizenship at the expense of citizen rights (cf. Howard's 'mutual obligation' and Bush's social conservatism). As a result of deregulation and the 'private is best' credo the thrust of social policy has been driven away from the need to redress social inequalities by state intervention to protect rights and entitlements of citizens. Clearly any social democratic government has to re-examine the role of the state in this regard. Admittedly, social democratic thinking in many western democracies (e.g., the Hawke-Keating era, which accepted much of neo-liberal economic policies) softened its traditional commitment to the implicit philosophy of social policy as one mainly concerned with inequality and distributive justice.

This has been largely due to the naïve assumption that the rationale of neo-liberal economic policies is also applicable to social policy; hence the simplistic view that the logic of the market also applies to the social sector. But, as Geoff Gallop has rightly observed in 1993, 'if economic rationalism is about the elimination of government redistributive mechanisms, then, alarm bells need to ring'.<sup>5</sup>

*"... it is important to recognize that governments, especially social democratic governments, may need to intervene more than in the recent past if they are to address the new social inequalities of the post modern era of global capitalism. A critical concept for addressing new social inequalities is that of 'social exclusion'."*

In fashioning a new rationale for social policy in WA in the 21st century, we need to pay due heed to the recent experience of other western social democratic countries, especially the UK and Scandinavia all of which have endeavoured to reconcile economic liberalism with the rationale of the orthodox welfare state based on the rights of citizenship.<sup>6</sup> This has led to a whole new body of social and political theorising labelled the 'third way', essentially a partnership between the market (economy), government (state) and the voluntary or NGO sector (civil society).<sup>7</sup> In this balanced integration of economic and social policy objectives, the focus of social policy must be 'life chances and ensuring that opportunities, and access to them are distributed fairly'.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, in the UK, the Blair government has experimented with the 'third way' philosophy in reforming its social policies.<sup>9</sup> Despite the shortcomings of the UK model, mostly relating to the Americanization of the UK welfare debate,<sup>10</sup> there are four notable features of the Blair government's approach to social policy, especially anti poverty strategies which warrant critical scrutiny by the Gallop Labor government in WA. These are:

1. The use of the concept of social exclusion to draw attention to the causes of disadvantage, inequality and deprivation, e.g., those due to gender, class, race, ethnicity, disability, or rapid social change;
2. The adoption of a life cycle perspective which requires recognising the needs of individuals of different ages and also the cumulative nature of disadvantage and deprivation;
3. A primary focus on public expenditure and public service reform as an instrument of social policy to tackle inequalities which affect individuals; and,
4. A widespread use of targets to create a culture of public service accountability (e.g., inclusion of output and input targets for service delivery, etc.). In short, the UK policies were target and performance driven to enhance efficiency and accountability.

However, a priority initiative of the WA Government must be to put into effect its election commitment to establish a Social Policy Unit as the mechanism for new policy development. If the new social policy ethos is to be target and performance driven, then one of the first undertakings of the Social Policy Unit should be to develop a database for policy development and subsequent policy evaluation. To this end, the Government should give high priority to produce a Social Report along the lines of the pathfinding USA document entitled Social Report.<sup>11</sup>

The idea of a Social Report in the United States dates back to the Report on Social Trends commissioned by President Herbert Hoover in 1929. This was considered to be essential for policy development and subsequently influenced the introduction of the Annual Reports on the World Social Situation by the United Nations from 1952 onwards.

One of the first tasks of these Social Reports was to develop social indicators to analyse the factors relevant to the achievement of specified social goals, i.e., those which define the level of an adequate standard of living and well-being in a given society. It was also intended to determine the effectiveness of social programs designed to solve social problems. In short, a Social Report was considered to be 'crucially important for those who are in decision making positions'.<sup>12</sup>

A Social Report in WA will provide an accurate account of living conditions and the state of welfare in WA, disaggregated by age, gender, ethnic and racial background, region, and different

types of family conditions. The material aspects of welfare could be presented in terms of social indicators which relate to public resources and investments (cf. AIHW welfare documents, the ABS 'Social Indicators' and publications from the OECD Social Indicator Programme). This documentation of relevant data and information will provide an accurate account of the nature and extent of social inequalities and thereby permit the proper targeting of resources aimed at redressing these inequalities.

Following the deployment of programs and services directed at alleviating inequalities, 'we need to watch very carefully, and we need to document and publicise the impact of social legislation'.<sup>13</sup> The Social Report will be one way of achieving these objectives. For example, in the Social Report (ideally presented as an Annual Report to Parliament) the welfare situation and the impact of social legislation will be fully described and analysed. The compilation of the WA Social Report, although directed by social scientists must at the same time be seen as a community endeavour. This also requires the active involvement of peak bodies such as WACOS, and ECC/WA, the voluntary sector and other community groups in compiling the Social Report. Tony Vinson's recent study of social inequalities in NSW entitled *Unequal in Life* (2000) may well serve as a model for the first WA Social Report.

Perhaps it is worth recalling that even Osborne and Gaebler, 14 the gurus of the New Right (also of the Court Government) agree that 'governments have a fundamental responsibility for seeing that public needs are met'. But more importantly, they add that 'If governments abdicate this in the name of privatisation and the free market, there could be only one result – disaster and human misery'.

## Endnotes

1. See M. Cahill (1994) *New Social Policy*. Blackwells.
2. R. Lister (2001) 'From Equality to Social Inclusion: New labour and the Welfare State'. *Critical Social Policy*.
3. L. Jayasuriya (1974) *AAP/WA Evaluation Reports*. Social Welfare Commission. AGPS.
4. Lister, *Ibid*.
5. G. Gallop (1993) *Opening Address to Conference in Perth on 'Beyond Economic Rationalism: Alternative Future for Social Policy'*. In P. Saunders & S. Graham (eds), *Beyond Economic Rationalism*. Sydney: SPRC, University of NSW.
6. L. Jayasuriya (1993) 'Citizenship and Welfare: Rediscovering Marshall'. In P. Saunders & S. Graham (eds), *Beyond Economic Rationalism*. Sydney: SPRC, University of NSW.
7. A. Giddens (1998) *The Third Way: A Renewal of Social Democracy*. Pluto.
8. G. Gallop (1993) *op.cit*.
9. See DSS (Department of Social Security) (1998) *New Ambitions for Our Country*. (The Field Report) London: Stationery Office.
10. A. Deacon (2000) 'Learning from the US? The Influence of American Ideas upon 'New Labour' Thinking on Welfare Reform'. *Policy & Politics* 28 (1): 5-18. Polity Press. See also R. Lister, *Ibid*.
11. US Dept of Health, Education and Welfare (1970) *Towards a Social Report*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
12. *Ibid*.
13. P. Edelman (1999) 'Welfare and the "Third Way" '. *Dissent*, Winter.
14. D. Osborne and T. Gaebler (1993) *Reinventing Government: How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector*. New York: Plume.

# STATE CONFERENCE SCHOLARSHIPS

This year's State Conference will be held in Perth 21-23 August 2001. An exciting program has been developed around the theme: "Social Work in the Marketplace". Take this opportunity to be a part of the action!

This year the AASW WA has two opportunities for members to participate in the conference for free. One opportunity is for a remote practitioner and the other is for a student or unwaged member.

## Remote Practitioner Scholarship

The AASW WA Branch is again seeking a Remote Practitioner to attend this year's State Conference.

As part of its support to remote practitioners to help them comply with the Association's CPE requirements, the Branch will support a member of the AASW who is a remote practitioner to attend this year's State Conference.

In order to be considered, an applicant must be:

- a member of the WA Branch of the AASW, and
- work in a remote setting, and
- would otherwise be unable to attend the conference.

Applicants who wish to be considered should provide a short submission to the selection committee of no longer than 2 pages outlining how attendance at the conference would benefit themselves, their clients and their agency.

It should also include a strategy of how they would disseminate the information acquired at the conference to their region or community when they return from the conference.

The person selected will have their conference registration paid including the conference dinner and receive a return economy class airfare to Perth.

The person will be billeted with an AASW member in Perth during their stay. Transport to and from the airport and assistance to get to the conference venue will be provided.

## The Erlene Chun Scholarship

Registration fee for this year's State Conference for a Student or Unwaged member of the WA Branch

The AASW WA Branch has pleasure in being able to offer a new Scholarship this year made possible from the donation of a WA member, Erlene Chun.

The Branch would like to hear from you if you are interested in attending the conference and having your registration fee paid for and are:

- a member of the WA Branch of the AASW and,
- are a student or are unwaged.

Applicants who wish to be considered need to submit a brief request of no longer than 1 page for sponsorship to attend the conference stating how you may benefit from attendance and how you may share the information with other colleagues.

The person selected will have their conference registration fee paid for attending all days of the State Conference.

Submissions for both Scholarships should be sent to:

**Executive Officer  
AASW WA Branch  
PO BOX 198 West Perth 6872  
Or Fax to 9310 3936  
No later than C.O.B Friday 1st June 2001**