



MEDIA RELEASE / Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers

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Breadth of social work deserves greater recognition

The day before this year's Social Workers Day on Wednesday 24 September, the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) has raised a concern that the breadth and value of work carried out by social workers throughout the social services and health sectors deserves greater recognition.

"There is a common misconception that the principal employer of social workers in New Zealand is the Child, Youth and Family service of the Ministry of Social Development," says Rose Henderson, ANZASW President.

"Of course CYF is the major provider of statutory child protection and safety services. However various estimates, including those by the Social Workers Registration Board in its latest Statement of Intent, place the non-government sector, as a whole, as the major employer of social workers".

"ANZASW believes that more work should be done to accurately identify and acknowledge the breadth and value of social work that takes place outside of government. With upcoming changes in the Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act, it is likely these social workers will carry new responsibilities for assessment work in addition to the excellent preventative and 'wrap-around' social work they have always performed. This will place more pressure on this diverse sector of the social work workforce, and we need to be more prepared to support those social workers," says Rose Henderson.

"Another sector of the social work workforce that is less visible to the public eye and often neglected, are those social workers who work in health. As many as 1200 of ANZASW members, or a third of our membership, have indicated they work in health or mental health settings, primarily at District Health Boards. Social work is the largest of the allied health professions, and must be adequately resourced and properly supported to play an effective part in multi-disciplinary teams".

"The demand for social workers is going to increase, with one estimate being that a further 1000 social workers will be needed by 2011. Because of an expected shortfall in the supply of qualified social workers and aggressive recruitment of social workers by overseas agencies, it is apparent that we are facing a workforce crisis that requires careful management," says Rose Henderson.

"It is a positive step that the Tertiary Education Commission has begun a project to put more focus on social work education to identify needs, gaps and priorities. We must do everything we can to ensure that the profession of social work is an attractive career option for future generations – across all sectors".

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