

Legislative Statement for the second reading of the Bill

Legislative Statement: The Social Workers Registration Legislation Amendment Bill

This legislative statement supports the **second reading** of the Social Workers Registration Legislation Amendment Bill (the Bill).

The purpose of the Bill is to delay the repeal of the experience pathway for social worker registration for four years. This will allow people without a prescribed social work qualification to continue to apply to register as a social worker on the basis of their significant practical experience.

The experience pathway is provided for in section 13 of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 (the 2003 Act). Section 13 of the 2003 Act allows people without a prescribed social work qualification to apply to register as a social worker using their practical experience to demonstrate they meet the competency standards set by the Social Workers Registration Board.

The Bill amends section 2(2) of the Social Workers Registration Legislation Act 2019 (the 2019 Act), which will delay the repeal of the experience pathway (section 13 of the 2003 Act) from 28 February 2024 to 28 February 2028.

The Bill will support the social work sector to adapt to significant changes in its operating environment since the original decision to repeal the experience pathway. In particular, the Bill will:

- avoid exacerbating workforce shortages currently faced by the sector due to increased demand for social workers, following the impacts of COVID-19 and Cyclone Gabrielle, along with decreasing social worker workforce supply;
- incentivise unregistered practitioners to apply for registration through the experience pathway following the decision to extend the social worker pay equity settlement in the government funded sector; and
- recognise the growing importance of a diverse social worker workforce that better reflects the range of communities it serves and the importance of culturally appropriate approaches in social work registration and practice.

The Bill will temporarily maintain the experience pathway while ways to broaden entry pathways into the social work sector are considered.