

Victoria to introduce licensing of disability workers – Premier announces

By **Linda Belardi** on December 1, 2016 in **Community Care Review**

The Victorian Government will introduce an independent registration and accreditation scheme for disability workers, becoming the first jurisdiction in the country to commit to the regulatory regime.

Labor Premier Daniel Andrews said the scheme would protect people with a disability from harm and would ensure workers had “the right skills, experience and qualifications.”

A spokesperson for the Premier confirmed to *Community Care Review* that an advisory group of experts, people with disability and sector and workforce representatives was being set up to help steer the scheme’s design.

“We are working to finalise a project timeframe and anticipate that stakeholders will be consulted on options for a scheme,” the spokesperson said.

While the government announced few details it said the system would help ensure appropriate worker screening processes were in place. The government did not specify the estimated costs for the state-based scheme.

Likely issues to be worked through in the development of the scheme include determining the job titles in scope and requirements set for minimum worker qualifications and professional development.

The Premier made the announcement at the Victorian ALP state conference on 12 November and the policy formed part of the government’s response to the findings of a parliamentary inquiry into abuse in disability services tabled last week.

The proposal for a registration and accreditation scheme was a major push by the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) in Victoria which argued for the creation of a risk-based system where higher accreditation standards are required for workers delivering support to individuals with complex needs.

Base level registration should require all disability workers to pass a police check, a Working with Vulnerable People Check and reference check and accredited workers would be searchable on a public register, the union said.

Scheme will ‘improve quality and skills’

In a statement following the announcement, HACSU state secretary Lloyd Williams said the scheme would provide a “much-needed layer of quality assurance and professionalism to the disability sector.”

“This scheme will improve the quality and skills of workers and the safety of participants, particularly those who are highly vulnerable and unable to self-advocate.

“The scheme will also assist in improving perceptions of the sector to prospective workers by demonstrating that delivering supports to people with disability requires a skilled and qualified workforce,” he said.

The CEO of the Victorian Council of Social Service welcomed the policy announcement and said the

government's training review and an independent worker registration accreditation scheme "would be essential in helping build the workforce's knowledge, skills and suitability for the job."

The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission has previously backed the proposal.

"We think that criminal penalties for people who seek to work or volunteer contrary to conditions attached to registration would be a powerful tool for compliance," the commission told the parliamentary inquiry into abuse of people with disability.

The Victorian decision comes as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) considers a national Quality and Safeguarding Framework for the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

A national registration and accreditation system administered by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency is already in place for 14 health professions.