

**Date:** 12 July 2016

**To:** The Parliamentary Select Committee: Social Services

**From:** Birthright New Zealand

**SUBMISSION: Inquiry into the operation of the Social Workers Registration Act 2003**

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## **About Birthright NZ**

Birthright NZ is a registered charity. Birthright has been operating in NZ as a national organisation for over 50 years. We work to strengthen and enrich the lives of children and families. We specialise in working with families led by one person. Our vision is for nurtured, resilient, inspired children and families.

Birthright NZ is a charitable trust with 11 affiliate organisations throughout NZ who deliver a variety of social services to children and their families. These organisations work with families with a wide variety of needs. They assess needs, provide social work services and also work closely with other community service providers to ensure children and families who need support can access appropriate services.

## **Introduction**

This submission focusses on the consideration of whether registration of social workers should be mandatory and the potential challenges to registration at present. In principle, Birthright New Zealand is in favour of mandatory registration for social workers. Registration recognises social work as a profession, supports a culture of continued professional development for social workers and recognises the complexity of their work and the vulnerability of the people who they work with. We do, however, have some concerns about the current mechanisms for registration and the cost implications for non- government organisations (NGOS) like Birthright.

We support the submission of Social Service Providers Aotearoa (SSPA), in particular, noting the reservations they have identified and their recommendation of a lead-in time if mandatory registration is introduced.

## **Our situation**

Recently we conducted a review of our service delivery model and as a result identified a voluntary move towards 100% registration of social workers as desirable.

Together, our affiliate organisations employ up to 40 staff in field work or social work positions with the majority of these staff (over 80%) being registered, assessed as competent or holding a diploma or degree in social work . The remainder are either studying towards a social work qualification or have a qualification in a related field.

We have proposed to our affiliate organisations a target of achieving 100% of all social workers registered or working towards registration by 2020. This recognises that although the norm will be that social workers are registered, at any given time we will also have staff/interns/students working under supervision who are on the pathway to registration.

In proposing this target, we have allowed lead in time to seek funding and manage the costs associated with registration. As an organisation we see it as desirable that this is a cost that is met by the employer as part of our investment in the development of our employees, particularly when we are requiring this as part of their employment. We also recognise that this would be a prohibitive cost for many individual staff if they were expected to pay their own registration.

This lead in time also allows us to progress our workforce development programme which will seek to build a pathway for staff towards registration.

Having already considered implementation issues in an environment where registration is voluntary we believe the following issues also require consideration if registration is made mandatory.

### **Issues arising from mandatory registration**

In our view, the main issues are:

- The current cost of registration and the ongoing cost of maintaining registration
- The need for more pathways towards registration
- The current mechanisms for registration which, in our view, require streamlining
- The lack of resourcing for NGOs to support mandatory registration and an ongoing CPD environment.

If mandatory registration is introduced, we consider it is critical that these issues are taken into account and a lead in time is included. We also support the continued inclusion of Section 13 of the Act which offers an experience qualified path to registration.

### **Conclusion**

In principle, Birthright New Zealand supports the mandatory registration of social workers, however asks that consideration is given to the current cost (both initial and ongoing) associated with registration, the current mechanisms for registration and the resourcing associated with implementation. We support a lead in time being part of any decision being made around mandatory registration.



Gabrielle O'Brien  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Birthright New Zealand**