Australia, with its seven million people, immediately followed suit when Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939. By the end of the year, troops had been sent to the Middle East, Australian naval forces had joined the British in the Mediterranean, and it had been decided that many Australian airmen should be trained for service in Europe and the Middle East. As the fighting spread, there was increasing anxiety about Australia's own security. Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and the rapid southward advance of Japanese forces through Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies brought a concentration of Australia's military forces near her shores to withstand threatened invasion. By mid-1943, the danger had passed, but Australia was still fully involved with the organisation needed to act as the base for the American forces in the western Pacific, and at the same time to prepare for the transition to peace.

New Social Policy

World War II made unprecedented demands upon Australia's economic, political, and social capacity. The pace of industrialism was greatly hastened. During the emergency of 1942, the labour force and non-essential production became strongly controlled. Only the Commonwealth government could handle the large national and international issues raised by the war, which meant that the pre-war trend towards central government authority was greatly strengthened. Of particular importance was the Commonwealth's assumption of full financial supremacy over the states by its exclusion of the states from the income tax field in 1942.
Apart from the increased importance of federal authority, the most notable feature politically was the emergence of a united federal Labor Party under strong leadership. The party had remained in the political wilderness for almost a decade after its destructive Depression experience. In October 1940, however, it almost won the federal election, but it would not enter a national government with the United Australia and Country Parties. An obvious way to gain Labor’s support in its handling of the wartime issues was for the government to make social service concessions, and this was the immediate reason for the introduction of a national child endowment scheme in March 1941. The scheme provided flat weekly payments with no means test for each child after the first in every family, and broke the drought of federal social security legislation which had lasted, except in connection with ex-servicemen, since 1912. In October 1941, the Labor Party came into office where it remained for the next eight years, and during this time enacted a wide range of social security measures. From spending less than £17 million on social services in the year 1938–39, the Commonwealth came to spend almost £68 million in 1946–47.

Between the wars, unlike Australia, many countries developed their social security measures, especially on social insurance lines, but the growth was usually piecemeal and haphazard. The war gave great impetus to the development of comprehensive integrated social security systems. The most celebrated plan was Beveridge’s, presented in 1942 in Britain,1 which laid the foundation for the establishment in 1948 of a full British social security scheme, a combination of social insurance and assistance.

In the United States, in 1943, the National Resources Planning Board presented a report which urged the government to ensure sufficient and appropriate employment opportunities, to extend the coverage of social insurance to as large a proportion of the population as possible, to develop a comprehensive general public assistance system, and to study and expand social services which were preventive and constructive in character.2 During the war years, when such questions of broad policy in the development of social services were raised, the American social work profession made only a small contribution; but there was

1 Sir William Beveridge, Social Insurance and Allied Services.
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an unprecedented demand for competent professional workers for specific social services. All the American professional social work groups operated through a joint committee: the Wartime Committee on Social Work Personnel. This gave professional classification to social workers in the military and government services; it also helped to unify the social work professional groups who, in the post-war years, formed a single professional association.

In Britain, as in the United States, the demand for specific competent social work services was unprecedented, particularly, for the first time, by government departments.³

Of special importance in Australia’s great extension of government social services in the 1940s was an all-party Commonwealth Joint Parliamentary Committee on Social Security. For five years, from July 1941, this committee inquired into and reported upon ‘ways and means of improving social and living conditions in Australia, and of rectifying anomalies in existing legislation’. Its nine almost unanimous reports covered most of the nation’s social welfare services, and strongly influenced much of the Commonwealth’s subsequent legislation. Many of its health recommendations were not, however, acted upon, mainly because of difficulties raised by the medical profession.

In its first report the committee stated that there was evidence that a considerable proportion of Australia’s citizens were poorly housed, ill-clothed, or ill-nourished. No longer could they sustain the claim that Australia was the social laboratory of the world. If the campaign against poverty was to be successful, it was essential that a national policy be developed – and this was done.

The Commonwealth government introduced non-contributory widows’ pensions in 1942, and funeral benefits and a new form of maternity allowance followed the next year. In March 1944, the Unemployment and Sickness Benefits Bill, again on a non-contributory basis, and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Bill were both enacted. In addition, legislation for hospital benefits was introduced, and there was a liberalisation of the invalid and old-age pensions schemes. The confirmation of the non-contributory principle in these new schemes was perhaps a reflection of the political party in power,

but in effect they were only non-contributory in the sense that no close relationship existed between the payment of graduated taxes out of which the social services were financed and the receipt of benefits. To keep costs within bounds, and to distribute money where it was assumed to be most needed, a means test was applied in the administration of most of the benefits, although there was growing opinion that it should be abolished for age pensions.

When the constitutional validity of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Act was successfully challenged in 1945, the validity of many of the other recently instituted social benefits was thrown into doubt. A successful referendum the following year, however, gave the Commonwealth the specific social service powers that it had in fact already assumed.

Closely linked with the establishment of the income security services was the acceptance by the Commonwealth government of a full employment policy. Few more important social policies emerged from the war. From having about 10 per cent of the workforce unemployed immediately before the war, Australia quickly moved into conditions of full employment, and as a result of government action, these conditions were to remain almost unbroken throughout the post-war period. In May 1945, the Labor government defined its employment policy in a white paper. No political party, least of all the Labor Party, could afford to neglect the demand for full employment in the post-war years. The great extension of central government economic power and a new understanding of the causes of depressions made such a policy practical, even though it brought another set of problems in its wake.

Another social policy which was of major importance in the post-war years, Australia’s population policy, was greatly affected by the experience of the war. Pre-war, the Depression had halted immigration, and estimates of Australia’s capacity to absorb a rapidly growing population had been drastically reduced. In addition, doubts on Britain’s ability to continue as the main emigrant nation had been expressed. The threat of invasion by an Asian power made Australians acutely aware of their small numbers. Since natural increase, though the most desirable, was slow, the solution was immigration, and an immigration which included a considerable proportion of non-British, but still European people. Moreover the war greatly increased national confidence to handle a bold post-war immigration programme within a full employment policy.
The small group of qualified social workers in Australia was among the many witnesses from whom the Commonwealth Parliamentary Committee on Social Security gained its evidence, but, in general, on questions of broad social service policy their influence was slight. To specific policies, they did, however, make a much greater contribution, and there was a greatly expanded demand for their professional services.

Social Workers in Demand

The disruption of family life, the increased rate of juvenile delinquency, the entrance of large numbers of women into industry, the unmarried mothers, the emotional stresses of a wartime society, the need to rehabilitate servicemen – these all created conditions conducive to social work appointments. An attitude that social workers were only concerned with ‘the poor’ quickly lost ground; but expansion was delayed by the numbers, sex, and inexperience of the qualified social workers available. As will be observed in the next chapter, the output of the training bodies did not increase until the immediate post-war years, women students were still the great majority, and the numbers of social workers were still apt to be reduced by marriage.

In July 1941, only 95 qualified social workers were in employment throughout Australia. Apart from four engaged in social work education, 39 of the remainder were in Victoria, 31 in New South Wales, 11 in South Australia, five in Western Australia, three in Tasmania, and one each in Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory. Altogether only nine worked for Commonwealth government agencies, 10 for state government agencies, and one for local government.4

In its first report, the Committee on Social Security mentioned an increasing reliance on trained social workers and research officers as a marked advance in the administration of social services overseas, and recommended their appointment by the Commonwealth Social Services Department. Eventually, towards the end of the war, there was an isolated appointment of an experienced and well-qualified

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4 Memorandum attached to Proceedings of the Conference of Representatives of Departments of Social Studies in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide, July 4–6, 1941.
social worker, Lyra Taylor,5 as the department’s chief research officer. As a great many of the Commonwealth’s expanded social welfare functions were administered through this newly formed department, it was a crucial appointment for professional social work in Australia. The only other significant social work appointment in Commonwealth agencies during the war was that of Jean Robertson6 in September 1940, as Assistant Director of the Industrial Welfare Division of the Department of Labour and National Service. This appointment did not extend beyond the war period and few qualified social workers actually worked in industrial settings.

This record of social work employment in the wartime Commonwealth public service is poor, but to be expected. In 1941, acting as spokesman for the training bodies, the Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University wrote to Commonwealth government officials expressing concern that when nursing, teaching, medical, or scientific skill was required only those qualified were appointed, but for social welfare no training was demanded.7

At the end of the war there was a surge of interest by Commonwealth authorities in the employment of qualified social workers. The Director-General of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, Dr H.C. Coombs, convened a conference of representatives from four Commonwealth government departments, the Universities Commission, the Australian Red Cross Society, and from both the general and medical social work training bodies and associations. His purpose was to examine the extent to which ex-members of the forces could look to social service careers, and the extent of the demand for social workers created by the re-establishment and rehabilitation programmes of various government and non-government agencies.

5  Lyra Taylor, MA, LLB (University of New Zealand); Dip. Soc. Sci. (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore). A lawyer in New Zealand; went to the USA, interested in Children’s Courts; qualified as a social worker; Family Welfare Agency, Baltimore; Family Service Association and teaching for the School of Social Work, Montreal; YWCA Montreal for five years; 1940 General Secretary, YWCA, Sydney, lectured on group work for Sydney University Board of Social Studies; returned to North America in November 1942; came to Australia for the appointment in the Commonwealth Social Services Department. Member, Sydney University Board of Social Studies, 1941–42; NSW Council of Social Service Committee, 1940–42; Melbourne University Board of Social Studies, 1947–52.
6  Jean Robertson, MA, Dip. Soc. Sci. (Glasgow); came to Australia in 1939 to work as fieldwork tutor for the Victorian Council for Social Training.
7  J.D.G. Medley to Dr Roland Wilson, Department of Labour and National Service, 8 July 1941.
Many of the authorities recognised the need for qualified services but wanted them almost immediately. Numerous opportunities were lost on this and other occasions in the post-war years because the qualified people were not immediately available.

Qualified social work made a few piecemeal gains in state government agencies during the war, and there was considerable hope of future development. For example, by 1943 in New South Wales where social work training was now directly financed by the state government, the departments of child welfare, education (in its child guidance clinics and in the play centres of the National Fitness Council), and health (in mental and public hospitals) were employing at least some qualified social workers. In addition, the National Fitness Council was sponsoring plans for community centres and wanted qualified leaders, the Health Department wished to have social workers for its proposed care for children of working mothers, and the Housing Commission expected a demand for social workers in its post-war programme. Moreover, it was being pointed out that, overseas, social workers had proved their value in school social work, assistance with relief cases of chronic dependency, industrial welfare work, probation, work in family relations bureaux, and the rehabilitation of the disabled and people discharged from sanatoria – all of which came, or could come, under the state government.

Towards the end of the war the Adelaide City Council, following the Melbourne City Council, appointed a social worker, and the South Melbourne City Council, after a survey by Melbourne's general social work training body, established a scholarship for one of its residents to qualify to work with its social welfare services. Otherwise, local government was an untouched field for qualified social work.

One or two public hospitals opened almoner departments, for example the Newcastle in 1943, and some added to their almoner strength, but others were unable to obtain any staff and towards the end of the war the established almoner departments in civilian hospitals were very badly understaffed. In mid-1945, nine Sydney hospitals

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8 Department of Post-War Reconstruction, *Training of Social Workers and Other Officers, Conference with Training Authorities, Melbourne, August 9th, 1945*.

9 Most New South Wales public hospitals were only state agencies in that they received government subsidies and came under the surveillance of the Hospitals Commission.

10 Memorandum (from Elizabeth Govan?) for Professor Stout re State aid to students.
employed 18 almoners, and eight Melbourne hospitals employed 19. No almoners worked in Queensland or Tasmanian hospitals, scarcely any worked in Western Australian hospitals, and Adelaide had only five in its two main hospitals. There were at this stage, however, 19 almoners employed by the Australian Red Cross Society throughout the Commonwealth and eleven more employed in various non-medical settings, five of these with UNRRA in Europe.11

After urging from the almoners’ association, the Commonwealth government, with the approval of the three services, authorised the Red Cross to undertake a scheme for the rehabilitation of servicemen in military hospital units. In July 1941, the society appointed a qualified social worker, Marion Urquhart,12 as its Director of Rehabilitation to organise the scheme throughout Australia. Two years later, it was estimated that 31 almoners were then needed. Some qualified social workers without medical social work training were employed, and even then there were too few. The Society’s programme, with its offer of a more obvious war service, a uniform, and a higher starting salary, inevitably drew qualified people away from medical and other social work in the civilian population.

The Committee on Social Security recommended that the work of almoners should be developed as part of any national health service. An estimate, in 1943, of New South Wales medical social work needs gives a figure of about 200 almoners.13 Clearly there had to be an enormous increase in the number of qualified people available before there could be a truly national medical social work coverage.

In Britain, the extreme shortage of almoners together with a greater emphasis on preventive medicine brought a reappraisal of their functions. Casework skills, research, and cooperation with doctors were stressed to the exclusion of routine administrative work. Australian almoners also tried, but with varying success, to avoid becoming immersed in administrative work. The statement of an almoner’s

11 New South Wales Institute of Hospital Almoners, Annual Report 1945.
12 Marion Urquhart, Certificate of the Victorian Institute of Hospital Almoners, 1934; first almoner at the Woman's Hospital, Melbourne; 1936–41, Almoner and Chief Executive Officer, Victorian Society for Crippled Children, which gave her experience in rehabilitation of the physically handicapped.
13 New South Wales Institute of Hospital Almoners, Annual Report 1943.
functions used by the New South Wales Institute was changed in 1943 in the direction of stressing casework skills and working in cooperation with the medical staff, not under their direction.

The Red Cross medical social workers in the military hospitals worked in close cooperation with the Army Medical Service, the Army Education Service, the Repatriation Department, and the various social agencies concerned with the welfare of sick or wounded servicemen. A development closely connected with their work was the establishment of Red Cross social welfare departments to help ex-servicemen discharged medically unfit, or those who later became unfit as a result of war service. These were, in effect, family casework agencies.

Qualified social workers began doing family casework during the war through agencies designed to help servicemen or ex-servicemen and their dependants, and to a very much lesser extent, through church agencies. In Melbourne, the AIF Women’s Association was established in 1940, and two years later the Returned Soldiers’ League set up a Fighting Forces Family Welfare Bureau which grew out of its Servicemen’s Child Welfare Committee. In November 1940, in Adelaide, the Returned Soldiers’ League instituted a Family Welfare Bureau financed by the Fighting Forces Comforts Fund. Each of these agencies employed qualified social workers. The most substantial development of this kind was, however, in Sydney. Early in 1940 the Lord Mayor’s Patriotic and War Fund set up a Family Welfare Bureau, and by 1944 it employed seven qualified workers.

The Catholic Social Service Bureau was founded in Melbourne in 1936, primarily to screen and help applicants to Roman Catholic institutions for children, but much of its work had developed along family welfare lines. Similar bureaux opened in Sydney and Adelaide in the early 1940s, and, in 1944, the Church of England established in Sydney another general family casework agency – its Family Service Centre. Apart from extending family welfare work undertaken by qualified people, these agencies provided qualified social workers with an opportunity to influence the social provision of the churches.

One other field, psychiatric social work, showed some signs of movement, although it was still greatly underdeveloped. The Committee on Social Security asserted that the general public
lacked sympathy with and understanding of mental illness. War neuroses began to create in some quarters, however, a new interest in psychiatry and also the social rehabilitation of psychiatric patients. A completely new development was the Red Cross Society’s desire to employ many psychiatric social workers in its rehabilitation scheme, if they had been available. In 1944, it actually sent four social workers to the Mental Health Course in London because no local training in psychiatric social work existed.

A Sydney psychiatrist said in 1943 that the psychiatric social worker was now recognised as a valuable ally of the psychiatrist in child guidance and adult psychiatric clinics, and in mental hospitals. In that year, at Callan Park in Sydney and Royal Park in Melbourne, social workers were first appointed to Australian mental hospitals. The child guidance movement was still to be found only in Sydney, and psychiatric clinics in general hospitals remained without necessary social work services. The psychiatric revolution for the civilian population had to await the 1950s.

Despite their new employment frontiers during the war, the qualified social workers continued to be primarily engaged in helping individuals, although some did work with groups. A great many, in whatever agency they worked, found themselves shaping policy, either singly, or collectively through their associations.

**Collective Activity**

Before considering the part played in those war years by the social work associations, changes in the nature of the associations should be mentioned. The most important of these were the establishment of general and almoner groups in South Australia, the coming to life of the federal body of the almoners’ association, and the further definite move in 1945 by the New South Wales general association towards an organisation exclusively for qualified people.

In 1941, the six qualified almoners then in Adelaide formed the South Australian Branch of the Australian Association of Hospital Almoners. Naturally, the Australian membership requirements applied which

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14 Irene Sebire, *The Psychiatrist and the Social Worker*. 
meant that only qualified almoners were eligible to join. The immediate reason for the establishment in 1942 of the South Australian Social Workers’ Association was to make more effective an approach by the qualified social workers to the Red Cross, Civil Defence and government authorities about the newly created civilian relief depots. The association’s objects and membership qualifications were almost identical with those of the New South Wales general association.

The latter, however, three years later, made important changes in its membership rules. Provision for associate members was first restricted, then eliminated. Two main reasons were given: there was now a growing membership of qualified social workers, and the need to discriminate in the choice of associate members had proved difficult. People who had undertaken only the emergency industrial welfare courses, described in the next chapter, were not considered qualified social workers by the association.15 This trend towards a closed association was to be expected because, generally, provided there were enough members, it allowed the organisation to be more effective in carrying out its own aims. The function of linking the trained and the untrained could be taken over by broad coordinating bodies such as councils of social service.

Towards the end of the war the general associations in Sydney and Melbourne each had roughly 90 members, and in Adelaide there were about 60. The Sydney branch of the almoners’ association more than doubled in size in the war years and was drawing level with the Melbourne branch, which in 1945 had 36 members; and the Adelaide Branch about nine to 12. Following the pre-war pattern, the great majority of members of the associations were unmarried women, and all members of the almoners’ association were women.

The members and the executive of the Sydney general association met about 12 times a year, which was more frequently than their counterparts in Melbourne and Adelaide. Of the three almoner groups, however, Melbourne was by far the most active, although despite increasing membership, all three continued without executive committees. In the early war years, and still in 1945 in Adelaide,

15 In 1941, a group of practising personnel and industrial welfare officers established the Personnel Officers’ Association of Australia, with the two foundation divisions in New South Wales and Victoria.
the yearly average of members’ attendance at their meetings was over half the total membership. In the general groups the percentage of attendance was rather lower.

The Central Council of the Australian Association of Hospital Almoners began operating during the war years, first in Melbourne and then from mid-1942 in Sydney. In July 1945, it was decided that meetings should be at least quarterly. The council concerned itself with such matters as standardisation of records, reports on Australian developments to members and to British almoners, discussion of salaries, and recruitment of students, but it was hampered by problems encountered by many national organisations in Australia. The state in which the central body was located tended to be over-represented, the travelling of representatives from other states was costly and took time, and executive action was inclined to be slow. By the device of sometimes using local people to represent other states in which they had once worked, the almoners’ association increased attendance at its council meetings and reduced costs. Only occasionally could representatives from other states attend and then it was sometimes when they were on other business. No branch challenged the view of the Australian president in 1943 that for the national development of the association, branch representatives should have a degree of voting freedom, without having to refer everything back to the branch.16

What did the social work associations do during the war? In 1943, the retiring president of the New South Wales Social Workers’ Association urged that a well-balanced programme for such an association should include self-protective activities to prevent exploitation of functions and services, the improvement of the community’s social services, and the professional development of social workers.17 In speaking of the first, self-protective activities, she said that the association had so far almost completely neglected these because there had always seemed to be more important things to do. During the war years, however, more attention was given to standards of employment, in the almoner groups more quickly than in the others. The shortage of almoner students impelled the almoner groups to try to improve their salaries and working conditions, but in both Melbourne and Sydney they became enmeshed in complex negotiations. Many interested

16 Australian Association of Hospital Almoners, Central Council Minutes, 13 March 1943.
17 President’s Report, Social Workers’ Association of New South Wales, 1943.
but not necessarily informed parties were involved, and there was uncertainty on how salaries should be based – whether on the number of beds, assistants, or responsibility. In New South Wales, wage pegging regulations drew the almoner group into court action which they found slow, expensive, and unproductive. The almoners found themselves being grouped with medical auxiliaries who had lower training standards and less responsibility. General social workers, with only a two-year training, were sometimes commanding salaries higher than the almoners; and, as mentioned, Red Cross offered a higher starting salary.

In the view of the general training bodies, action on social workers’ salaries should be the function of the social workers’ associations. 18 As yet, however, the general associations had very little interest in such matters. At the end of 1942 the Victorian Association asked the general training body for its cooperation to establish a minimum salary of £225, and in 1944, on request from an agency, it drew up a scale of salaries which it distributed to all agencies employing social workers. On this, the starting salary was £250 and a social worker in charge of an agency was to receive at least £300. The New South Wales Association by the end of 1945 had still taken no action, but it had, since late 1943, collected information on members’ salaries and working conditions and had just appointed a committee which promised to act. The newly formed South Australian general group was only slightly involved in such questions.

Another matter in which some of the social work associations began to take an interest was acting as an employment exchange. Only the Victorian general association developed this interest at this stage, and even in the post-war years, this possible function remained underdeveloped in each state.

The question of a professional code of ethics appears to have been first raised in 1945 in the Victorian almoner group, when it was argued that a code was necessary because almoners’ work was growing, and because almoners were so often the deputies of the medical profession. In 1944, prompted by action taken by physiotherapists, the question of registration of social workers was raised in the New South Wales

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18 Report of the Conference of the Boards of Social Studies of the Universities of Adelaide, Melbourne, and Sydney, held in Sydney on August 16th and 17th, 1944.
general association. A social work code of ethics was not, however, finally decided even by the early 1960s, nor by then had the question of registration even been carefully considered.

There was, then, what may be described as a beginning interest in self-protective activities on the part of the associations. Their interest in improving the community’s social services, already apparent in the 1930s, was developed much more strongly and was given great stimulus by the war. By 1943, the president of the New South Wales general association could assert that the association was likely to be consulted on every important social service move. In urging the full participation of members, she stated that times were abnormal, the association was building for the future, and that social workers should take part in community activities leading to social action and reform, rather than remain working extremely long hours in their agencies doing work which was mainly remedial not preventive.¹⁹

The wartime activities of the qualified social workers outside their agencies, usually through their associations, were in fact fairly extensive and on some projects intensive. There was very little expert advisory opinion that could be used by those responsible for making rapid and far-reaching changes in social policy and provision. In particular, there existed one underdeveloped council of social service throughout the country, and no general advisory social welfare body existed on a national level. (Yet the movement towards coordinating and rationalising social services did receive some stimulation by the war, for towards the end a council of social service was getting under way in Victoria, in mid-1945 a Queensland Council of Social Agencies was formally established, and a Youth Welfare Coordinating Council, which later developed into a council of social service in July 1946, was established in Adelaide in October 1943.)

In their joint action, the qualified social workers approached premiers, ministers, senior public servants in Commonwealth and state government departments, municipal authorities, governors’ wives, officials of voluntary bodies — in fact whoever was likely to have most influence in bringing about a desired change. Repeatedly they advocated that individual differences should be borne in mind by planning authorities; that for economic, humanitarian, and social

¹⁹ President’s Report, Social Workers’ Association of New South Wales, 1943.
reasons, preventive and rehabilitative work should be promoted; that individuals’ total needs, psychological and social as well as economic, should be recognised; that all sections of the community, not just servicemen and their dependants, should be adequately provided for; and that trained people were needed to make social provision effective.

On a national level the social work associations submitted evidence to the Committee on Social Security. In addition, in 1942, they were among the organisations invited by the Commonwealth Attorney-General to express a view on the proposed change in the federal constitution to give wider social service powers to the Commonwealth government. Moreover, it was action by the almoners’ association which led to the Australian Red Cross Society’s national rehabilitation scheme. The general association in Sydney was responsible for a quite different development which reached beyond the borders of their state. This was the publication by the local Council of Social Service of a bulletin which, it was hoped, would attract intelligent interest to social questions and services. Neither its content nor its circulation was confined to New South Wales.

On a local level, each of the social work groups helped to prepare their cities for bombing. At the beginning of 1942, the Civilian Aid Service accepted the offer of the New South Wales Social Workers’ Association to organise and staff Citizens’ Information Bureaux, similar to the British Citizens’ Advice Bureaux. The public did not make extensive use of the bureaux which were established and interest in them faded as the possibility of air attack waned. Through this project the qualified social workers did become much better known in the Sydney community, but it sorely taxed their time and powers of organisation.

The immediate reason for forming the general social work association in Adelaide was concern that Civilian Relief Depots should be established. By March 1942, there were 12 of these, staffed by untrained Red Cross volunteers. The Premier later appointed a Civilian Welfare Advisory Committee, which included the whole executive of the newly formed Social Workers’ Association, to advise on the organisation of a Civilian Welfare Bureau, an agency to coordinate the work of the existing depots. The association ran lecture courses for the staffs, and eventually gained the appointment of a qualified social worker, on loan from the Children’s Welfare Department, to run the bureau.
In addition to this activity to combat enemy attack, the general social work associations in both Sydney and Melbourne assisted government authorities with evacuation plans. Furthermore, in Sydney, the almoner group prepared a classification of patients and receiving houses; almoners were to play a vital role there if it was necessary to evacuate hospital patients.

The qualified social workers showed particular concern for British children evacuated to Australia. In the discussion in Sydney and Melbourne in 1940 between voluntary groups and government authorities about arrangements to receive and place these children, the qualified social workers stressed the need for careful selection of children and foster homes and adequate supervision. In the event, the state child welfare departments took full responsibility for the scheme. Only in Melbourne was outside assistance accepted. There, all the qualified workers combined to assess over 1,200 homes which had offered to take the newcomers. The results were used by the Children’s Welfare Department, which appointed a qualified social worker to supervise arrangements.

Perhaps the most spectacular social action in which the qualified social workers played an important part was in connection with government child welfare provision in New South Wales. Towards the end of the 1930s, it seemed that the New South Wales Child Welfare Department was going to be the first state child welfare department in Australia to adopt progressive policies, giving individual consideration to children and parents by qualified staff, and linking government and non-government child welfare programmes. The department already had a history of ineffectual inquiries and Royal Commissions when, in 1938, its secretary initiated a comprehensive permanent Child Welfare Conference which brought together people engaged in, or knowledgeable about child welfare work. The conference ran into official opposition. The department’s secretary was removed to another part of the public service and the conference was superseded by a nominated Child Welfare Advisory Council, introduced by the primarily consolidating Child Welfare Act passed in October 1939. Leading qualified social workers and members of the social work training bodies were in the thick of these developments, and were appointed members of the new Advisory Council. Already by 1939, statements which sounded progressive were emanating from the department’s minister. For instance, he stated, with reference to
staff training, that social work in its present-day form called for high qualities of personality and specific skills and techniques which could best be imparted by fieldwork and formal instruction.20

Then came the war, and with it a series of studies which recommended far-reaching changes. In 1942, the Pre-School Child Committee of the Child Welfare Advisory Council made many recommendations to the appropriate minister, Clive Evatt, and in 1944 reiterated the urgent need for change. The Standing Committee for Child Welfare of the New South Wales National Council of Women made recommendations to the Child Welfare Department in 1943 about foster home placement, and, in 1944, on adoption procedure. In each of the reports the need for adequately trained staff was stressed, but none of the reports had any immediate impact. It was over provision for delinquent children that the department was eventually impelled to act.

In December 1941, the Delinquency Committee of the Child Welfare Advisory Council submitted a report to the minister on the prevention and treatment of the mounting delinquency in the community, but it was ignored. The following year it reported on the mass abscondings and riots in the Child Welfare Department’s institutions, and also put forward the case for establishing more child guidance clinics. Adverse publicity eventually forced the minister to seek assistance from the Advisory Council. Throughout 1943, members of the Delinquency Committee intensively studied cases of girls at the Girls’ Industrial School at Parramatta.

A foreword to the resulting report claimed that the general conditions found at Parramatta could be matched at institutions throughout the Commonwealth.21 They reflected the community’s scale of values which still emphasised punishment and detention rather than re-education. According to the report, the Child Welfare Department needed a large increase in the numbers of inspectors, insistence upon training for all new inspectors, an extensive ‘in-service’ training programme, the appointment of a trained experienced caseworker to a senior position to organise the in-service training and to act as consultant to inspectors, and, finally, an increase in the staff of the child guidance

20 Quoted in Child Welfare in New South Wales (departmental booklet), pp. 17–8
clinics, particularly in the social work field. To obtain the necessary funds, the department was urged to assume community leadership in the care of the children of the state, to be open and frank about its problems, and to seek public support. If this was out of keeping with public service traditions, public opinion should be organised to change those traditions.

The report went to the minister and nothing further was heard. Exasperated, the Advisory Council took action. The Chairman of the Delinquency Committee wrote two trenchant articles for the press slating child welfare practice in New South Wales. An avalanche of public criticism of the Child Welfare Department followed. There was genuine sympathy with departmental officers doing difficult work under bad conditions, but not with official attitudes which refused to admit any shortcomings in the department’s administration and which dubbed the critics ‘academic theorists’.

The Advisory Council eventually went direct to the Premier, W. McKell. With an election in the offing, the Premier agreed that the minister should be changed, the position going to the best available man, and at the same time ordered a public service judicial inquiry into the running of the Child Welfare Department. The outcome was that by 1945 there was a new minister and a new departmental head, and a strong reform mandate which included an emphasis on training of the department’s officers. One of the bitter disappointments of the post-war period was the failure of the department to employ a substantial number of fully qualified social workers.

The qualified social workers’ wartime social activities were by no means confined to those mentioned so far. The New South Wales general group trained some voluntary workers for the Women’s Auxiliary National Service; it took part in a Women’s Forum discussing post-war reconstruction; it prepared a memorandum on housing for the Reconstruction authorities; it sent money to an appeal by the British Mental Health Emergency Committee; it took part in the Legacy Club’s deputation on widows’ pensions to the Minister of Social Services and added to the club’s report; it was interested in a survey of children of working mothers; it supported a move to establish another Child Guidance Clinic; it was concerned with establishing housekeeper services; it was keen to maintain the interest of citizen volunteers beyond the war period; the Commonwealth Department
6. AN EXPANSION OF OPPORTUNITIES

of Social Services invited it to make suggestions for the training and employment of invalid pensioners; it was keen to improve the lot of unmarried mothers; it objected strongly to the Recreation and Leadership Movement setting up a Standing Committee on Community Centres instead of working through the Council of Social Service; it urged the case for increased widows’ pensions with the Director-General of Social Services; and it recommended a school social work service to the Education Department.

The Sydney almoner group had many similar interests but in addition it urged an improvement in state aid with surgical appliances; it made a significant contribution to a Public Health Sub-Committee of the National Council of Women and sent a memorandum on their recommendations to the Minister for Health; its members gave their services in an honorary capacity to the Medical Benevolent Association; it made a survey of the care and accommodation of cancer patients and was mainly responsible for a similar survey of tuberculosis patients in New South Wales; one of its leaders was a joint author of a Council of Social Service report on housing for the Commonwealth Housing Commission; it spent time considering various proposals for the nationalisation of medicine; it made recommendations for coping with the increased venereal disease among women and girls; and it was concerned about the lack of provision for chronic cases.

At the end of 1940, the Melbourne general group decided to adopt a more aggressive policy in social welfare matters. Its interests during the war included young offenders, unemployment and standards of living, the handling of truant children, repatriation problems, difficulties connected with women in industry and war work, the temporary placement of children, youth during the war, juvenile labour, the breast feeding of illegitimate children, the forming of a council of social service, Service regulations concerning pregnant women, the care of families not entitled to rehousing, a Children’s Court clinic, the falling birth rate, increased venereal disease, the running of the central index, housekeeper services, allowances to dependants of people dishonourably discharged or in prison, and anomalies in Commonwealth unemployment and sickness benefit provisions.

As in Sydney, the interests of the general and specialist groups overlapped. Among the Melbourne almoner group additional interests were legislation for controlling venereal disease, a gift from Australian
almoners to English almoners who were victims of air raids, the conditions at a convalescent home, the ‘adoption’ of a prisoner of war, the provision for the chronically ill, the care of male inebriates, national health plans, pensions of patients in mental hospitals, the lack of housing, and priority for housing on health grounds.

The activities of the two small new groups in Adelaide covered far fewer topics. The general group there did, however, take an interest in a ‘Women for Canberra’ move, the appointment of a qualified social worker to the Adelaide City Council, the changing of legislation on venereal disease, the establishment of a Youth Welfare Coordinating Council, the appointment of a psychologist by the Education Department, and the running of the central index.

The war was, then, a period when the qualified social workers in Australia took a keen collective interest in improving the community’s social welfare services. At least in Sydney and Melbourne, their aims became much more widely known in social welfare circles and some government circles, but whether the general public was more aware of their existence is, however, difficult to decide.

In Sydney and Melbourne especially, educational opportunities for qualified social workers expanded. A few agencies – the Red Cross Society, the Family Welfare Bureau in Sydney, the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the Sydney Hospital – now had enough social workers to make staff development programmes effective, but still most social workers looked outside their agencies for their professional stimulation. The training bodies were too busy to provide refresher courses, except for those offered by the Sydney general training body in September 1941. It was to their associations that the qualified workers turned. Their social action frequently involved them in study, and association committees met to discuss professional skills. In addition, the general membership met frequently, often to hear speakers of some community or professional consequence.

No interstate social work conferences were held during the war; but the New South Wales Social Workers’ Association did hold four residential weekend conferences; and the Victorian Social Workers’ Association two, and also a one-day conference at Melbourne
University. Representatives of interstate associations sometimes attended these conferences, and so did American social workers attached to the American Red Cross in Australia.

As well as the educational activity of their own associations, the social workers in Sydney now had that of the New South Wales Council of Social Service – its public lectures, meetings, journal, and library. For all groups, the main professional stimulation through literature still had to come from abroad.

A small vigorous group of able leaders with a fair measure of experience were largely responsible for guiding the associations in their social action and were often its main instruments; also, frequently it was they who initiated or sustained the associations’ educational activity. With experience, and sometimes with training in either Britain or North America as well, they derived their stimulation not only from each other and the demands of the local situation, but from American and British writings. The gap, in terms of experience and competence, between them and most of the social workers was, however, considerable. During the war there could be no dramatic improvement in the basic professional training, and marriage continued to weaken the occupational group, leaving a disproportionate number of inexperienced people in the profession. Yet it is likely that the fact that qualified social workers were almost all unmarried women, and the rather confined social base of the group, were not as restricting as formerly, for sex roles were changing and social differences were more tolerated under wartime conditions.

The war years provided qualified social work with a great expansion of opportunities, and to some extent they were seized. In 1945, Lyra Taylor asked the qualified social workers in Victoria a number of probing questions about their place in society. These were taken seriously and studied by the Victorian Social Workers’ Association with the following result:

1. Does the progress in professional social work mean a lessening or loss of the service motive in social work? Answer: It does not mean a lessening of the service motive, but rather a refining and disciplining of it for the better understanding and service of mankind.
2. How far does the professional social worker identify herself and the professional interest with free enterprise groups from whom the money is derived? Answer: The general opinion is that professional social workers in Melbourne have not allowed their casework to be so influenced. Wider participation in the community’s political and economic as well as social development is desirable, but the Association should not tie itself to any specific group.

3. Do you think there is some element of patronage in social work? Answer: There has been a marked element of patronage in past years, but this has been eliminated in modern professional work. This change of attitude is becoming more appreciated by the public as our work with all income groups increases.

4. What is the professional social workers’ attitude towards this age of social planning and social control? Answer: Whatever the social framework of society, the social worker will judge it by the consequence to the individual – the effect on human personality. Social workers should judge the trend towards community planning from this professional viewpoint.\(^2\)

Apparent in this is a new awareness of themselves as a group with a professional identity.

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\(^{2}\) Victorian Association of Social Workers, Minutes, 4 April, 22 May, and 24 July 1945; Annual Meeting Minutes, 28 February 1945; Executive Minutes, 16 March 1945.