

Careers in Community Work

Many occupations, one profession



If you are passionate about working to improve the lives and circumstances of individual, families, groups and communities this may be the profession for you.

Who is a community worker?

A community worker is a person who has the knowledge, skills and values to work with individuals, families, social groups or communities to promote or restore social functioning.

Community workers advocate for the rights of individuals and communities and work to address systemic barriers that prevent the social and economic inclusion of all citizens. Promoting social justice and maximising human potential are cornerstones of community work.

In practice community workers provide services, support, activities, information and referral for those in need of assistance. They link people with appropriate services, groups, communities and each other.

Practitioners are often distinguished by the client area within which they work. These may include aged care, disability services, Indigenous and multicultural support, asylum seekers and refugee services, mental health, child and family services, counselling, schools, emergency relief, youth, justice, housing and community development.

Over 50 occupations fall under the community work banner and roles include intake, support, case work, crisis intervention, team management and advocacy.

Common occupational titles

- Alcohol and Drug Officer
- Child Protection Officer
- Community Development Officer
- Community Support Worker
- Counsellor
- Crisis Intervention Worker
- Disability Services Officer
- Juvenile Justice Officer
- Multicultural Support Officer
- Residential Care Officer
- Welfare Worker
- Youth Worker

Is community work right for you?

Community workers:

- derive satisfaction from helping other people
- recognise inequality in society and possess a desire to promote change
- empower and educate clients to act on their own behalf
- work independently and as a member of team
- have the ability to communicate effectively with others
- assess, plan, implement and evaluate projects and programs
- have the skills and flexibility to work with multiple client groups in a variety of settings.

Who employs community workers?

Practitioners may find work in a paid or voluntary capacity and in addition to providing direct services, people involved in the management or governance of community service organisations may fall under the community work banner.

Community workers can be employed in the not-for-profit, government and private sectors. Some community workers may want to work in not-for-profit organisations only, whereas others look for the relative security of government jobs that focus on the provision of human services.

Practitioners seeking work in non-government positions may find employment with community development organisations, welfare centres, social enterprises, neighbourhood houses, emergency relief agencies, home and community care organisations and residential care facilities.

Ethical practice in community work

A code of ethics is an explicit document that lays down the expectations of a professional working in the field. In the case of community work practitioners adhering to a code is essential because their work is with some of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of people in society. You can view the ACWA Code of ethics for community workers online at www.acwa.org.au/resources/code-of-ethics

What are the career pathways?

Workers can undertake certificate level qualifications in community sector areas such as aged care or home and community care (HACC). This can be a good way to get a feel for the sector and job seekers with these qualifications typically gain employment as support workers and personal care workers. The ageing population and increasing need for skilled workers in disability support roles see these graduates in high demand.

Many community workers begin their career by undertaking a relevant diploma level qualification. The most common of these is the Diploma of Community Services Work which provides students with the knowledge and skills they need to work with a wide range of clients in a variety of settings.

However, this is not the only qualification which can prepare you for this career, other diploma courses focus on specific areas within the community services sector such as disability.

Diploma courses should involve a 400 hour fieldwork placement component which is the professional standard and which enables students to put their skills into practice through supervised field experience. It is for this reason that community work-related diplomas are not normally undertaken 100% online.

Bachelor degree qualifications studied at university also provide a pathway to employment and common courses include Bachelor of Human Services and Bachelor of Social Science.

People with previous experience in the community sector may wish to explore gaining recognition of prior learning (RPL) through a course provider. RPL allows your skills, knowledge and experience to be counted towards a formal qualification.

What are the job prospects?

The community services and health industries are the largest and fastest growing in Australia and it is estimated that they will generate approximately 1 in 4 of all new jobs by 2015-2016 (CS&HISC 2012 Environmental Scan).

As well as providing excellent job prospects in the major cities, rural and regional areas have particularly high demand for community workers and is an option new graduates are encouraged to explore.

Useful links for beginning your career in community work

Australian Community Workers Association www.acwa.org.au

Is the professional association and national voice for the 500,000 community workers in Australia. Fundamental to its purpose is the protection of educational, fieldwork and practice standards to ensure workers met the high demands of the Australian community for quality services.

Quality community service courses www.acwa.org.au/course-accreditation/approved-courses

To ensure your employability in the sector ACWA has compiled a list of high quality courses that meet industry standards and will have you work-ready upon graduation.

Job seeking in the community sector www.acwajobcentral.com.au

ACWA Job Central is an online job search site for community service employment opportunities across the country. The portal is specifically for community sector positions which means it's easier to find the job you want.

Discounted police checks <https://acwa.nationalcrimecheck.com.au>

National Crime Check is a quick, simple and secure way to get a national police check report. Once all the correct paperwork and ID has been provided, most police checks are processed within 24-48 hrs.

Union for sector workers www.asu.asn.au

Most community workers will fall under the Australian Services Union (ASU), a union that exists to defend and advance the rights of their members at work and to achieve better wages and conditions.

