



Australian Community Workers Code of Ethics

Most professions expect their members to meet a standard of ethical behaviour; this requirement is often formalised through a code of ethics. In the case of community work ethical behaviour is essential because practitioners often work with the most vulnerable and marginalised groups of people in our society. This practitioner-client relationship may be defined in a number of ways but in this document it is taken to mean the relationship that has resulted through the engagement of an individual, group, or community with the services of a community worker.

The Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA) code of ethics sets the foundation for exemplary community work practice and is the benchmark for all practitioners. As the professional association for community workers ACWA has defined a community work practitioner as a person who holds a relevant qualification and has the values, knowledge and skills to work independently or with others in an agency or program intended to facilitate or ensure social inclusion. The community worker is therefore expected to acknowledge and respect the worth of all individuals regardless of their race, religion, age, gender, sexual and gender diversity, and other individual differences.

Conduct opposed to the full recognition of human dignity and individual rights within the community worker's professional practice shall be considered improper and unacceptable within the community work profession and to the Australian Community Workers Association.

Principles underlying the code of ethics

1. Every human being, regardless of race, religion, gender, age, sexual and gender diversity, or other individual differences has a right to maximise his or her potential providing it does not infringe upon the rights of others.
2. Social inclusion is a human right where every individual has an active role to play in society and has the expectation of full social, educational and economic participation. An inclusive society is based on the fundamental values of equity, equality, social justice, and human rights and freedoms, as well as on the principles of tolerance and embracing diversity.

3. Every society has an obligation to provide for and deal equitably with all its members and to make extra provision for those who are excluded or disadvantaged.
4. Every person is legally protected against discrimination on the basis of age, sex, race and disability and their universal human rights are inviolable.
5. The Australian Community Workers Association recognises Australia's first people and their right to self-determination

Responsibility to clients

1. The community worker:
 - shall determine with the client or client group the exact nature of the relationship, the role of the community worker, and clarify the expectations of the client
 - shall regard all information concerning clients as confidential except where:
 - with the permission of the client, referrals are to be made, or other professional consultation, opinion or advice is sought;
 - failure to disclose information would breach the terms of the community worker's employment (such exceptions must be notified to the client); or where
 - failure to disclose information would contravene mandatory reporting requirements or other legal obligations
 - has an obligation to treat clients with dignity and to safeguard, promote and acknowledge their capacity for self-determination
 - in exercising certain powers and using information, is accountable to the client to ensure that:
 - they are fully informed of their rights;
 - have choices; and
 - can access information about themselves
 - will improve their skills and knowledge for the benefit of the client
 - will establish and maintain professional boundaries with clients at all times and not form personal relationships that compromise the primary practitioner-client relationship

Responsibility to employers

2. The community worker, as an employee, is expected to:
 - carry out the duties and responsibilities of the role as outlined in their terms of employment by adhering to the stated aims, policies and procedures of the employing body
 - achieve the aims of the employing organisation without denying clients their rights
 - bring to the employer's attention where organisational expectations or practices contravene the profession's code of ethics - particularly in the area of client rights
 - maintain a professional relationship with clients at all times and disclose any out-of-hours contact or social media contact
 - act responsibly in the expenditure of public monies

Responsibility to colleagues

3. The community worker is expected to:
 - share professional knowledge and insights with colleagues
 - respect the skills, knowledge and experience of colleagues including volunteers
 - be generous in using their skills and knowledge to enhance the practical fieldwork education of students
 - discuss any unethical behaviour that may have been observed in a colleague directly with their colleague unless to do so would pose a risk to a client or the practitioner
 - acknowledge and observe the legal rights and protections of colleagues, including, but not restricted to, confidentiality and privacy, workplace health and safety, and anti-discrimination legislation.

Protecting the reputation of the profession

4. The community worker will:
 - maintain, through ongoing education and training, the standards required for exemplary and contemporary practice
 - address in a timely manner and through an appropriate channel any behaviour in a colleague or an employer that is either incompatible with this code, or impinges on the rights of clients and their families, or contravenes the law
 - seek advice when unsure of a course of action and make informed decisions
 - participate in any complaint process if a public complaint is brought against them
 - distinguish in public statements, for example on social media, whether acting as an authorised spokesperson of their organisation or in a private capacity
 - respect the rights and legal protections of others
 - act responsibly in the expenditure of public monies
 - disclose any improper relationship between a colleague and client
 - meet the expectations of this code and the practice standards at all times.