



ACWA
AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY
WORKERS ASSOCIATION

Professional Practice Series



Australian Community Work Practice Guidelines

In writing a set of practice guidelines, the Australian Community Workers Association is defining a standard of practice to which it holds its members accountable. These guidelines, however, are relevant to all community work practitioners including those involved in intake, support, case work, crisis intervention, team management, community development and advocacy roles. The guidelines have been developed in consultation with practitioners, industry partners and education providers, and exemplify what is considered good practice in the sector.

All community workers, regardless of qualification, industry experience or specialisation, need to demonstrate throughout their career that they meet a recognised and ethical standard of practice, which protects the client, the community, and the practitioner.

These practice guidelines are underpinned by a code of ethics, and it is within this ethical framework that exemplary community work practice occurs.

Values underpinning ethical practice

Like all other professions, community work is shaped by a code of ethics and a set of values that guide the qualified practitioner. For the community worker, a commitment to social inclusion and social justice is fundamental to their practice, along with a respect for the individual and their right to self-determination.

How to use the guidelines

These guidelines, along with their indicators, have been written to provide a framework for community work practice. Originally conceived as standards, the new guidelines expand upon the Australian Community Workers Code of Ethics and provide a benchmark for experienced practitioners, as well as a guide for new community workers entering the profession. The guidelines are not intended to conflict with the requirements of an employing organisation but they do set out a minimum acceptable standard. The guidelines are written in such a way that practitioners can assess themselves against the indicators and plan their professional development accordingly.

The guidelines

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Guideline 1 *Ethical practice*

A community work practitioner, in providing services to individuals and communities, should work in accordance with a code of ethics and in agreement with the principles of individual worth and the individual's right to social inclusion.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 1.1 Apply the principles of social justice, equity, individual worth, human dignity and self-determination in all day to day professional practice.
- 1.2 Practice ethical behaviour in every situation in accordance with the Australian Community Workers Code of ethics.
- 1.3 Seek advice, if required, when confronted with an ethical dilemma.
- 1.4 Challenge policies and practices that are unjust or fail to meet accepted community standards such as human and legal rights, social inclusion and self-determination.
- 1.5 Reflect on personal beliefs and values and identify those that might impact on the rights of others.
- 1.6 Base relationships with service users or groups on the principles of respect and human dignity regardless of a service user's own attitudes or behaviour.
- 1.7 Identify and appropriately address ethical issues, such as breaches of confidentiality, privacy, and professional boundaries that may occur when using online tools for service provision.
- 1.8 Use resources and public monies responsibly and for their specified purpose.
- 1.9 Use knowledge and skills for the benefit of the service user, the employing organisation and the common good.

Guideline 2 *Provision of services and supports*

A community work practitioner should base their professional practice on the theory of community work and the principle that individuals, families, groups and communities have a fundamental human right to access appropriate services and support.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 2.1 Provide services that meet the needs of individuals and communities and facilitate their right to social inclusion or social justice.
- 2.2 Encourage service users to actively provide feedback on the effectiveness or otherwise of services.
- 2.3 Routinely advise service users of their right to complain and how to access the organisation's complaints policy.
- 2.4 Ensure that they do not discriminate against or in any way disadvantage a service user who has made a complaint.
- 2.5 Use appropriate research, planning and evaluation methodologies when providing community and human services.
- 2.6 Facilitate effective outcomes by routinely monitoring, evaluating and improving upon services, programs and projects.
- 2.7 Retain currency in theory and practice to underpin all service provision.
- 2.8 Advocate for service users and needed services.
- 2.9 Recognise the sometimes imbalance of power between themselves and service users and take care to not abuse that authority.

Guideline 3 *Confidentiality in the workplace*

A community work practitioner should understand and comply with all legislation and guidelines that provide for confidentiality and privacy of service users, colleagues and employers.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 3.1 Be familiar with the relevant legislation and the organisational policies relating to confidentiality and privacy.
- 3.2 Inform service users as to who has access to his or her file and under what circumstances the information contained therein is or may be shared.
- 3.3 Provide service users with access to their own files and make them aware of the process to record or amend any representation, notation or omission with which they disagree.
- 3.4 Protect a service user's privacy through secure record keeping.

- 3.5 Seek informed consent from service users before any confidential information is shared, unless required by law.
- 3.6 Advocate for non-disclosure of confidential information where a practitioner believes that disclosure would adversely affect a service user.
- 3.7 Provide privacy to service users who wish to discuss sensitive matters.
- 3.8 Destroy obsolete confidential information or records in a secure manner.
- 3.9 Apply the principles of confidentiality to information that pertains to colleagues and employers.
- 3.10 Remind colleagues, who disclose confidential information, of their obligations under the various legislation and policy requirements that govern the workplace.

Guideline 4 *The regulatory framework*

A community work practitioner often works within complex organisational structures governed by legislation or statute. The practitioner must, therefore, understand the sometimes seemingly contradictory frameworks that impact either on service provision or the service users with whom they work.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 4.1 Comply with legislation and statutory provisions, for example, mandatory reporting, which affect professional practice.
- 4.2 Alert their employer of relevant legislation not observed by the organisation.
- 4.3 Deal with service-user information in accordance with the principles and requirements of legislation including that which governs privacy, confidentiality and freedom of information.
- 4.4 Work within the legal limitations around the right to confidentiality.
- 4.5 Inform service users about the legal limitations to their right to confidentiality and privacy.
- 4.6 Ensure information systems relating to service users, resources, programs and projects are in place, and kept in accordance with legislation and organisational policy and procedural requirements.
- 4.7 Ensure that the fundamental human rights of an individual are not impinged through the misuse of authority granted through law.
- 4.8 Understand which pieces of legislation govern organisational behaviours, for example, workplace health and safety, and inform the service user group wherever necessary.

Guideline 5 *Diversity*

A community worker works within diverse communities and should demonstrate in all of their professional practice an understanding and sensitivity to diversity in all forms and her or his compliance with all relevant legislation.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 5.1 Respond appropriately to diversity in all its forms.
- 5.2 Acknowledge and promote the rights of culturally and other diverse groups.
- 5.3 Challenge organisational behaviours and services that discriminate on the basis of individual or group characteristics including ability, age, beliefs, economic, employment and housing status, ethnicity, faith, gender and gender identity, and sexuality.
- 5.4 Recognise personal values and bias and takes steps to safeguard against any adverse impact these might have on a service user's right to a service. Recognise and declare conflicts of interest.
- 5.5 Gain information from relevant individuals and Indigenous and culturally diverse communities to ensure professional practice, policy, or service development is appropriate to community and service user needs.
- 5.6 Engage in individual and collaborative knowledge building to ensure professional practice with culturally or otherwise diverse or minority groups is appropriate and effective.
- 5.7 Adapt communication means and methods to effectively connect with a diverse range of people.
- 5.8 Use culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication when engaging with individuals and community members.

Guideline 6 *The workplace*

A community work practitioner rarely works alone and should treat their workplace with respect and take personal responsibility to ensure that it is a productive, safe and healthy environment within which they, service users, colleagues or residents can work or live.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 6.1 Understand and respect the nature and context of the workplace, which may also be the residence or home of service users.
- 6.2 Continually develop and use knowledge and skills within the workplace for the benefit of service users, colleagues and employers.
- 6.3 Maintain professional boundaries with service users and colleagues.

- 6.4 Acknowledge and protect confidential, sensitive or commercially valuable workplace information and intellectual property.
- 6.5 Treat colleagues with respect, honesty and consideration.
- 6.6 Deal with conflict in a timely manner.
- 6.7 Report discriminatory, bullying or otherwise adverse behaviour by a colleague toward clients or another staff person.
- 6.8 Recognise and act upon individual responsibility for workplace health and safety.
- 6.9 Understand and implement organisational policy and procedures.
- 6.10 Take up any areas of concern, either regarding policies, service provision or workplace behaviors with the appropriate supervisor, manager or employer.

Guideline 7 *Professional development*

The education of a community work practitioner does not cease upon graduation. It is incumbent on the community worker to undertake relevant professional development throughout their career to ensure their knowledge remains current and informs their everyday practice.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 7.1 Identify skill and knowledge gaps and remedy through training, supervision or other means.
- 7.2 Seek appropriate professional support, mentoring or advice to address personal and professional limitations.
- 7.3 Critically analyse the profession, human service agencies and organisations, and social institutions in all aspects of the community work role.
- 7.4 Acknowledge personal responsibility and accountability for actions, decisions and professional development.
- 7.5 Increase new knowledge and information about the profession, the sector or areas of practice through active engagement with research and enquiry.
- 7.6 Keep abreast of current research, models of practice, and theory.
- 7.7 Supervise students, staff and volunteers in an ethical manner and from an appropriately qualified knowledge base.
- 7.8 Share information and knowledge with colleagues.

Guideline 8 *Professional standing*

Community work practitioners not only represent the interests of service users and employers but are also representatives of the community work profession. Community workers should therefore, practice with integrity and not engage in any behaviour that brings the profession or other practitioners into disrepute.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 8.1 Know, understand and work within the ethical norms of the profession.
- 8.2 Maintain appropriate professional and personal boundaries with service users and colleagues.
- 8.3 Seek support and guidance when personal issues are affecting professional conduct or practice.
- 8.4 Recognise and redress inadequate knowledge and experience is through professional development, training, support or supervision.
- 8.5 Promptly address the inappropriate, unethical or illegal behaviour of a colleague through suitable means.
- 8.6 Exhibit awareness of social, political, legal, cultural and organisational contexts and systems, and how they might impact on the community work profession.
- 8.7 Acknowledge and support the right of service users, carers, members of the public and colleagues to make a complaint against the unethical, unprofessional or inept practice of a community work practitioner.
- 8.8 Demonstrate an understanding of relevant legislation and legal frameworks which specify responsibilities towards clients, colleagues, employers or community members in the workplace.
- 8.9 Promote, take pride in, and advance the profession of community work.
- 8.10 Recognise that private behaviour should not have an adverse impact on professional practice or the profession.