

# A Guide to Community Work in Australia



**ACWA**

AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY  
WORKERS ASSOCIATION

# What is community work?

---

Community work is concerned with the welfare and wellbeing of all Australians. Professional community work is sometimes confused with support work or personal care and while it's definitely one of the caring professions (like social work) the profession is a lot more than just 'helping'. Community workers make a real difference and deal with complex cases and situations.

Community workers are the many qualified people who work with individuals, families, groups and broader communities to ensure social and economic inclusion and access to needed services, support and opportunities.

Social justice, human rights and equity are the foundations of community work.

## What do community workers do?

### **Support people to find needed services**

One of the most important roles in community work is to help people obtain the right services when needed; whether it's housing, financial support, counselling, emergency accommodation, child protection or advocacy.

Working alongside other professionals, such as social workers, doctors and psychologists, community workers are often the first to help when people need it.

### **Empower communities to meet their goals**

Community development is an important aspect of community work and here practitioners support and resource community members to come together and generate their own solutions to shared problems.

The general principles of community development are empowered communities, inclusion, self-determination, social justice and human rights.

# Enable wellbeing

The community worker role is not just to link people to welfare support and services, but to understand the social, political and economic forces that influence wellbeing. Wellbeing, as a human right in civil society, is a core professional value for community workers.

In a country like Australia, wellbeing includes such things as family functioning, social inclusion, material resources, health, support networks, employment and skills, and secure housing.

## Where do practitioners work?

Community work jobs are primarily found within the community services sector. Most practitioners are employed either by government agencies or non-profit organisations. However, some community work practitioners are employed in the private sector, or as consultants or counsellors running their own businesses.

The non-profit sector is made up of organisations that exist only to meet a social purpose. This sector is also known by other names such as: the voluntary, not-for-profit, non-government, or community sectors. Community work is diverse, and practitioners work in a variety of settings including:

Hospitals	Refuges
Local Government	Information and Advocacy Services
Child Protection	Community Development
Out of Home Care	Social Housing
Community Gardens	Homelessness Services
Intake and Assessment Services	Family Violence Centres
Multicultural Centres	Student Welfare
Drug and Alcohol Support Services	Schools
Courts	Youth Work
Refugee and Asylum Seeker Services	Youth Outreach
Men's Health Services	Specialist Disability Services
Community Centres	Management
Mental Health Services	Government Services
Juvenile Justice Centres	Volunteer Management

# Did you know? In Australia...

---

*‘Disadvantage can extend from one generation to the next and that children living in poverty are much less likely to do well at school.’*

**\$161 billion** was spent on welfare by Government in 2017-18.

**In the next 5 years** it is projected that growth in community services will be very strong.

**80%** of people with a qualification were employed compared with 54% of people whose highest education was Year 10 or below.

**435,000** people received community mental health care in 2017-18.

**159,000** children between the ages 0-17 received child protection services and the number of children receiving these services has increased 11% since 2013-14.

**116,000** people were estimated to be homeless on Census night in 2016.

**1 in 23** Australians are estimated to face deep and persistent disadvantage.

# A values-driven career

Most community work practitioners have a strong sense of social justice and fairness.

Many enjoy working for values-led organisations that have a social purpose and also aspire to meet one or more of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Find out more about the SDG Goals at <https://sdgs.org.au>



# Your career starts here

---

## Work experience

You can use the work experience organised through your school to test whether community work interests you as a career. The community sector is large and diverse so think carefully about your options but also don't give up if your first try isn't the right fit.

## Volunteering

Before you enrol in a course, you could get involved in some real-life community work by volunteering. See [www.govolunteer.com.au](http://www.govolunteer.com.au)

Australians give over 141.1 million hours each year to the community sector and the volunteering rates are high for young people. If you volunteer, not only will you gain some insight into what a future career might look like, you'll also be doing something useful and meaningful.

## Qualification

To be a professional community worker you'll need a minimum qualification of a diploma. However, many community work practitioners have a degree in human services.

Both options will lead to good job prospects but to make the best choice, consider where you want to go in your career. The pyramid diagram will help you make some important decisions.

To make things easy, the professional body for community workers, Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA), has approved a large number of TAFE and university courses that can lead to a career in community and human services. You can find the list on the ACWA website [www.acwa.org.au](http://www.acwa.org.au)

Remember lots of courses have the same name but some are better than others. Look for the ACWA stamp of approval and make sure, that at the very least, you enrol in a course that includes face-to-face classes and offers at least 400 hours of practical fieldwork. Avoid any course that does not have an adequate face-to-face component or you may find it harder to get a job when you graduate.

# ACWA

Leads the development, identity, registration and recognition of the community work profession in Australia. For more information about a career in community work and advice on how to choose a course, visit [www.acwa.org.au](http://www.acwa.org.au)

## CPD

Progress your career by upskilling and selecting training that meets your career goals and aspirations.

## Codes and guidelines

Use resources to help you in your day-to-day work.

## Job search

Don't be tempted to take up work for which you are over qualified.

## Practical fieldwork

Make sure your placement meets the course and skill-level requirements.

## VET or tertiary education

Choose an accredited course that will qualify you for roles and career opportunities that interest you and match your aspirations.

## Volunteer work

Whether you have left school or not, you can test out your aptitude for community work by volunteering in human service organisations.

## Career choice at school

Use the opportunities at school to help you decide what you are good at and what you would like to do. Work with the careers teacher or get involved with some of the careers programs that are offered.

Your exciting journey starts here.



# Compare the roles

ABOUT THE ROLE		COMMUNITY WORKER	SOCIAL WORKER	SUPPORT AND PERSONAL CARER	VOLUNTEER
QUALIFICATION	Degree	Three year degree in community/ human services or a specialised field	Four year Bachelor of Social Work, two year Master of Social Work	NO	NO
	Diploma	Diploma in Community Services or in a specialised field	NO	NO	NO
	Mandatory practical fieldwork	YES/minimum 400 hours	YES/1000 hours	NO	NO
	Certificate	NO	NO	YES	Available
	On the job training	NO	NO	YES	YES
TYPICAL ROLES	Case management	YES	YES	NO	NO
	Assessment	YES	YES	NO	NO
	Counselling	YES	YES	NO	YES
	Team management	YES	YES	NO	YES
	Project management	YES	YES	NO	YES
	Referrals	YES	YES	NO	YES
	Advocacy	YES	YES	NO	YES
	Senior management	YES	YES	NO	NO
	Crisis support and intervention	YES	YES	NO	NO
	Personal care and support	NO	NO	YES	NO
	Disability services	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Aged care	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Family and children's services	YES	YES	NO	NO
PRACTICE FIELDS	Child protection	YES	YES	NO	NO
	Youth	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Alcohol and other drugs	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Community development	YES	YES	NO	NO
	Mental health	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Family violence	YES	YES	NO	NO
	Government	YES	YES	YES	YES
	For profit	YES	YES	YES	NO
EMPLOYERS	Not for profit	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Private practice	YES	YES	YES	NO
	Clinical services	NO	YES	NO	NO
	AVERAGE PAY	\$50,000 - \$100,000+	\$60,000 - \$100,000+	>\$53,000	Unpaid
PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION		Australian Community Workers Association	Australian Association of Social Workers	Not applicable	Not applicable

## Contact:

WEBSITE: [www.acwa.org.au](http://www.acwa.org.au)

FACEBOOK: [facebook.com/AuCommunityWork](https://facebook.com/AuCommunityWork)

EMAIL: [info@acwa.org.au](mailto:info@acwa.org.au)

PHONE: (03) 9642 5166

ABN 28 696 828 620



**ACWA**

AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY WORKERS ASSOCIATION

