



**AASW**

Australian Association  
of Social Workers

# *AASW Clinical Social Work Capability Framework*

2019

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## PREAMBLE

The Australian Association of Social Workers is the body mandated by members, Higher Education Providers (HEP) and the broader professional community, to set and maintain standard of professional conduct for social workers in Australia. The AASW has been charged with the professional accreditation of social work programs. The *AASW Accredited Clinical Social Worker Capability Framework 2019* articulates the capabilities required for advanced clinical social work practice.

These capabilities apply to clinical social workers and are to be read in conjunction with the [AASW Code of Ethics 2010](#) and the [AASW Practice Standards 2013](#). The Code of Ethics identifies the values and moral principles that underpin social work practice and outline the required level of attainment for ethical social work conduct and accountability. All AASW members are required to comply with this Code and it informs all AASW documents and policies. The Practice Standards 2013 outline the requirements for effective, professional and accountable social work practice in all social work contexts. They provide essential guidance to the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards.

This capability framework provides detail on the capabilities that need elaboration in the clinical social work context. Unlike the Practice Standards 2013, which apply to social workers at any point in their professional lives, the applicability of some elements of the clinical capability framework will depend upon the social worker's experience, practice setting and role.

This capability framework does not include all entry level skills as this is an assumed foundation for a social worker seeking accreditation as a clinical social worker.

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# FRAMEWORK SUMMARY

## **CAPABILITY ONE**

### **Consistently demonstrates advanced effective engagement skills with those accessing services**

*Ability 1a: Provides advanced responses within appropriate ethical, theoretical and practice-based frameworks*

*Ability 1b: Demonstrates advanced clinical engagement skills with those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*

*Ability 1c: Demonstrates advanced clinical engagement skills with people from a range of cultures, classes, ages, ethnicities, religions, peoples of diverse bodies, genders, sexualities and abilities*

*Ability 1d: Demonstrates an advanced ability to establish the foundations of a collaborative working relationship*

## **CAPABILITY TWO**

### **Assessment and analysis of need and concerns**

*Ability 2a: Demonstrates advanced clinical practice skills in the identification and assessment of clinical needs of the person/s and their environment. This includes intrapersonal, interpersonal and social concerns*

*Ability 2b: Applies advanced critical thinking, systemic analysis and problem-solving skills in all assessment, case formulation and service provision planning*

## **CAPABILITY THREE**

### **Risk**

*Ability 3a: Demonstrates an advanced ability to conduct assessments and reviews of the components of clinical risk and ensures these inform treatment planning and review*

## **CAPABILITY FOUR**

### **Provides effective services**

*Ability 4a: Demonstrates the ability to work collaboratively with clients on their treatment goals offering a range of evidence-based interventions to improve quality of life and wellbeing*

*Ability 4b: Draws on knowledge of person-in-environment, systems theory and other core theories to be familiar with social, psychological, spiritual, cultural and health factors influential in peoples' health and wellbeing*

*Ability 4c: Demonstrates specialist practice, theoretical and research knowledge around clinical intervention that informs all service provision for optimal health and wellbeing*

*Ability 4d: Develops broad human sector service knowledge and refers clients appropriately when client need is beyond the clinical social worker's knowledge and skill*

*Ability 4e: Develops systems to support evidence-based practice and considers outcome measures*

*Ability 4f: Works within established protocols and procedures of their sector/system/organisation*

*Ability 4g: Undertakes consultation, support, advocacy, supervision and debriefing with other agencies and services with the client in mind*

*Ability 4h: Evaluates the effectiveness of services with clients and adjusts service provision accordingly*

*Ability 4i: Terminates or renegotiates service provision when the relationship no longer serves the interests of the client and/or where a conflict of interest becomes evident*

*Ability 4j: Records and manages information in accordance with ethical principles and relevant legislation*

*Ability 4k: Actively seeks client feedback, both informally and formally, to inform service provision and enhance own professional development*

*Ability 4l: Actively engages in processes of professional reflective practice to continuously consider use of self, enhance understanding of clients' concerns and makes use of opportunities for lifelong learning*

*Ability 4m: Actively engages in high quality clinical supervision around cases to ensure clinical accountability and transparency in practice, as well as opportunity to identify areas for clinical growth*

## **CAPABILITY FIVE**

### **Advocates for legislative, policy and practice reform within the context of their role and clinical area**

*Ability 5a: Maintains current knowledge of policy and legislation and how they impact on the clients, their community and environment*

*Ability 5b: Appropriately works with others to achieve legislative and policy reform as informed by client need and clinical experience*

*Ability 5c: Makes recommendations to government on policy and practice reforms*

# AASW CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK

## CAPABILITY ONE

### Consistently demonstrates advanced effective engagement skills with those accessing services

#### SKILL INDICATORS

- Acts on an integrated understanding of the value of human relationships which are the basis of all clinical social work practice.
- Develops relationships with clients that are professional, collaborative, purposeful, and characterised by clear boundaries.
- Uses knowledge of the individual and contextual effects of oppression, discrimination and historical trauma to promote human rights in clinical goals and interventions.
- Articulates and applies a coherent social work practice model distinct from those of other allied health professionals.
- Engages with clients in ways that demonstrate belief, respect, valuing of knowledge and lived experience, such as active listening, checking their understanding, believing without judgement and assumptions, and acknowledging each client's existing strengths.
- Engages in active listening and asks open-ended questions to build trust and fully understand unique circumstances and concerns of clients.
- Uses culturally sensitive language to engage in a respectful way to understand the diverse cultural mores, context and beliefs that are part of an individual's lived experience.
- Explains client rights and responsibilities in regard to limited confidentiality and duty of care, and where possible informs clients when risk indicates that information-sharing with specific services or authorities is required.
- Identifies and responds to intersecting factors of socio-economic status, culture, race, religion, geography, age, disability, sexuality, gender identity and any other categories of potential oppression, which impact on the client's lived experiences.
- Understands the importance of culturally safe practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities and acknowledges barriers to provision and accessing support.
- Avoids stereotyping of client, issues or clinical presentation.
- Provides information to clients to support their understanding of the service system and navigating barriers to assistance.
- Communicates clearly and professionally in a timely manner in both writing and verbally.
- Understands their own limits of practice/service delivery and that of social work as a profession. Actively refers on any requests for services outside their professional experience and ability and the limits and scope of social work practice generally.
- Understands how their own personal experiences and emotional reactions may impact

their clinical practice with clients and works to establish distinct boundaries ensuring this is examined in supervision, regular reflective practice or, if more appropriate, taken to their own personal therapy.

- Employs clinical judgement and wisdom gained from a minimum of five years postgraduate social work practice.
- Applies knowledge about human diversity that characterises and shapes human experience and relationships.
- Understands the roles of other professionals and engages with them appropriately, according to the clients' needs.
- Understands the appropriate use of technology and actively applies this understanding to enhance social work professionalism.
- Practices ethically in the provision of all services.

***Ability 1a: Provides advanced responses within appropriate ethical, theoretical and practice-based frameworks***

- Draws on ethical principles of AASW, theoretical models and clinical frameworks to engage effectively with clients;
- Demonstrates high level self-reflection and self-regulation in clinical practice;
- Actively participates in professional supervision and critical reflection, collaboratively sets an agenda demonstrating openness to feedback regarding professional strengths and areas for growth;
- Has a well-developed, comprehensive and appropriate framework to support and inform practice;
- Provides strengths-based engagement which:
  - supports clients' autonomy, agency and expertise in their own decision making,
  - assists in making the connection between internalised self-perceptions and structural discrimination;
- Explores clients' reasons for any underpinning reluctance to access services;
- Develops culturally competent responses and practices including the need to tailor engagement strategies to work effectively in a culturally sensitive way with clients from diverse cohorts and communities;
- Makes ethical decisions in clinical practice using Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Code of Ethics, other professional social work codes, relevant laws and regulations, models for ethical decision-making, and consultation.

***Ability 1b: Demonstrates advanced clinical engagement skills with those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities***

- Provides services premised on human rights, self-determination, cultural respect and safety;
- Acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's connection to culture, land and community;
- Recognises the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culturally specific ways of raising children while maintaining the right of all children to a safe and nurturing upbringing;
- Consults with specialist services when working with people from diverse communities with which the social worker is not familiar;
- Employs cultural humility in clinical practice and understands the importance of



- reciprocity in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- Applies the principles and spirit of the AASW Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

***Ability 1c: Demonstrates advanced clinical engagement skills with people from a range of cultures, classes, ages, ethnicities, religions, peoples of diverse bodies, genders, sexualities and abilities***

- Provides services premised on human rights, self-determination, cultural respect and safety;
- Integrates knowledge of how diversity and difference shape the social worker–client relationship;
- Employs cultural humility in clinical practice, integrating cultural self-awareness with knowledge of, and openness to, learning from clients about their own culture to guide interventions;
- Consults and collaborates with specialist services to promote the inclusions of all peoples and communities;
- Attempts to address barriers to appropriate service provision.

***Ability 1d: Demonstrates an advanced ability to establish the foundations of a collaborative working relationship***

- Establishes a professional relationship through rapport and connection that aids communication;
- Has an advanced awareness of the use of self and how this can shape communication;
- Uses appropriate words and language in communicating with a diverse range of clients;
- Demonstrates advanced active listening skills and clarification and an understanding of non-verbal communication to enhance rapport building and full comprehension of factual and emotional content.

## CAPABILITY TWO

### Assessment and analysis of need and concerns

#### SKILL INDICATORS

- Engages in advanced active listening and asks open ended questions of clients in a sensitive, respectful and non-judgmental manner to explore clients' needs and concerns, their risks and protective factors, and to work with clients to determine an intervention plan.
- Utilises well-developed empathy and emotional attunement skills to listen and attend to clients, gather information, gain an understanding of the client's situation and accurately assess their concerns and needs.
- Has a well-developed understanding and capacity to ensure emotional regulation when clients are discussing traumatic situations/history.
- Explains client rights and responsibilities in regard to limited confidentiality and informs clients when articulated or assessed risk indicates that information-sharing with specific services or authorities is required.
- Modifies own practice to work with the dynamics and shifting nature of human interactions.
- Can articulate the physical, emotional and behavioural indicators of violence, abuse and discrimination and has the ability, skill level and awareness to assess these in an ongoing way throughout involvement with the client.
- Implements relevant and comprehensive screening and assessment processes.
- Is able to identify any presenting mental health conditions through structured clinical interview and use of screening and assessment tools.
- Navigates the complexities of clients concerns, needs, relationships and their intersections with relevant human service policies and legislation.
- Follows own and/or organisational policies, protocols and procedures in relation to assessment and response to clients.
- Implements responses that recognise and incorporate the emotional, developmental, psychological and physical safety needs of children, young people and adults.
- Delivers comprehensive psychosocial assessments in complex or high risk contexts.
- Can provide expertise as a consultant in specific specialised contexts to help colleagues formulate a specialised psychosocial assessment and/or treatment plan.
- Works collegially, accepts feedback and engages in reflective practice, supervision and other processes to ensure accountability and collaborative practice between service providers.

***Ability 2a: Demonstrates advanced clinical practice skills in the identification and assessment of clinical needs of the person/s and their environment. This includes intrapersonal, interpersonal and social concerns***

- Clarifies the client's request for help, readiness for change and presenting problem;
- Formulates an understanding of the client/s, including contributing factors in the presenting problem, interpersonal dynamics, historically relevant events, social determinants and cultural influences;
- Comprehends contributing factors beyond the presenting problem;
- Is able to identify and assess clinical needs around specific mental health conditions, including referral on where appropriate;

- Understands the uses and limitations of standardised screening instruments, assessment tools, diagnostic classifications and other sources of information;
- Gathers and analyses all information to create a multidimensional psychosocial assessment.

***Ability 2b: Applies advanced critical thinking, systemic analysis and problem-solving skills in all assessment, case formulation and service provision planning***

- Works collaboratively with clients and relevant others to identify issues and goals;
- Demonstrates an awareness of sensitivities to vulnerability and powerlessness;
- Develops a comprehensive case formulation based on a thorough psychosocial assessment that includes a risk analysis and possible risk-management plan
- Prioritises issues in case formulation and service planning;
- Makes active referrals to medical practitioners, allied health professionals and other agencies as appropriate. Continues to see the client and display professionalism and collaboration where this will achieve best client outcomes;
- Plans goals and interventions in a manner that affirms self-determination while being mindful of competing demands such as rights of others, organisational policies and relevant legislation;
- Plans interventions informed by critical analysis of strengths, weaknesses, current evidence and research;
- Demonstrates advanced awareness of ethical dilemmas and their resolution.

## CAPABILITY THREE

### Risk

#### SKILL INDICATORS

- Seeks information required to assess whether clients are at risk of trauma, vulnerability, harm, violence, abuse or are witnessing any harm, violence or abuse.
- Seeks information required to assess whether clients are at risk from suicide or self-harm and then manages or refers as needed.
- Seeks information required to assess whether clients are perpetrating harm, violence, abuse.
- Identifies, monitors and assesses risk factors in accordance with the relevant risk assessment and risk management frameworks.
- Reports any threats to personal safety according to agency/organisation policies and procedures and legislation.
- Appropriately instigates a duty to warn any adult third party of likely risk from a client, complying with relevant legislations and policies.
- Asks questions to identify cultural risks such as community retribution and/or risks of lateral violence.
- Works within a safeguarding framework to identify warning signs and specific risk indicators for clients and any others who are vulnerable.
- Makes reports to relevant authorities, where assessments indicate significant risk to children, young people or adults in a way that recognises the applicable threshold for mandatory reporting.

#### ***Ability 3a: Demonstrates an advanced ability to conduct assessments and reviews of the components of clinical risk and ensures these inform treatment planning and review***

- Develops comprehensive safety plans based on the information obtained in any risk assessment that is then updated to reflect the dynamics and experiences of clients over time;
- Encourages client participation in implementation, monitoring and modification of risks strategies and safety plans;
- Provides evidence-based information about risk factors and increasing risk;
- Demonstrates a strong understanding of the multiple impacts of experiences of trauma and the intersections of these risks with other factors;
- Foreshadows the benefit of other service providers participating in the development, implementation, monitoring and adjustment of case and treatment plans, as required;
- Identifies need for secondary consultation and referral to other services as required;
- Refers perpetrators where appropriate to services and agencies (including emergency services or security agencies) following identification or disclosure of perpetration;
- Supports clients experiencing high levels of risk or trauma and documents breaches of safety plans and intervention orders in order to identify and address instances in which systems failure has occurred;
- Maintains accountability processes throughout any intervention with perpetrators of violence or harm.

## CAPABILITY FOUR

### Provides effective services

#### SKILL INDICATORS

- Works collaboratively with clients to develop, implement and modify effective service provision.
- Clearly draws on a well-developed and continually evolving practice framework.
- Maintains current knowledge of clinical evidence base for effective clinical service provision.
- Incorporates knowledge of clinical outcomes and evaluations in ongoing service provision.
- Makes appropriate service referrals when needed for clients' wellbeing.
- Understands and works appropriately within relevant policies and legislation.
- Uses high level verbal and written communication to complete reports and records.
- Actively engages in professional reflective practice.
- Engages in meaningful and challenging clinical supervision based on social work practice knowledge and ethics.

#### ***Ability 4a: Demonstrates the ability to work collaboratively with clients on their treatment goals offering a range of evidence-based interventions to improve quality of life and wellbeing***

- Practices with a high degree of professional autonomy in the development of treatment plans and articulation of a required intervention to meet goals;
- Applies practice frameworks, specialised skills and advanced clinical knowledge in the development of treatment goals and plans;
- Reflects upon intervention/treatment plan during service delivery in collaboration with clients, and actively engages family/carers where appropriate in the development, review and modification of treatment planning;
- Demonstrates advanced skills in articulating both qualitative and quantitative outcome measures with clients to ensure transparency and accountability of interventions.

#### ***Ability 4b: Draws on knowledge of person-in-environment, systems theory and other core theories to be familiar with social, psychological, spiritual, cultural and health factors influential in peoples' health and wellbeing***

- Can articulate an advanced practice framework, theoretical influences on practice and implements evidence-based practice informed by this framework;
- Brings specialist knowledge of the person and their environment and how this interface relates to service delivery.

#### ***Ability 4c: Demonstrates specialist practice, theoretical and research knowledge around clinical intervention that informs all service provision for optimal health and wellbeing***

- Provides advanced clinical skill in the application of a range of therapeutic modalities to meet diverse needs;
- Can provide clear articulation of current relevant research and current best practice within a clinical practice domain;
- Provides consultation to others on how to proceed appropriately in complex cases

based upon research, professional expertise and experience (e.g. cases where impaired capacity or child protection issues arise).

***Ability 4d: Develops broad human sector service knowledge and refers clients appropriately when client need is beyond the clinical social worker's knowledge and skill***

- Demonstrates a depth and breadth of knowledge of complex systems and how to navigate client pathways, access and entry;
- Assertively engages with other service providers in service integration to meet the treatment goals of clients;
- Provides expert knowledge and advice to clients and the community on how to access appropriate services to meet needs;
- Can articulate a rationale for clinical escalation of care of a client and work in collaboration with clients to address concerns;
- Aims to provide a smooth transition for clients as they move across treatment settings;
- Provides clinical handover and assessment to assist with transition of care within the constraints of privacy and confidentiality legislation;
- Can articulate and provides a social work perspective when planning for continuity of care is complex;
- Provides mediation and conflict resolution interventions to enhance clinical treatment and continuity of care;
- Advocates on behalf of the client with third parties when appropriate and with the client's permission;
- Promotes awareness of cultural and cross-cultural issues when appropriate.

***Ability 4e: Develops systems to support evidence-based practice and considers outcome measures***

- Contributes where appropriate to the development of social work specific approaches to monitoring outcomes;
- Champions the usefulness and relevance of evaluation tools and evidence-based practice and supports their utilisation and frameworks within a practice context;
- Utilises existing validated outcomes measures as appropriate;
- Applies evaluation measures that are both quantitative and qualitative in nature;
- Evaluates tools and methodologies designed to monitor outcomes and provides expert opinion as they apply in clinical social work practice;
- Participates as appropriate to processes that enable clients to meaningfully contribute to the development and evaluation of outcome measures.

***Ability 4f: Works within established protocols and procedures of their sector/system/organisation***

- Demonstrates advanced knowledge of sector policy and procedure within their clinical practice domain;
- Influences and contributes to the development of new policies, processes and procedures;
- Facilitates the ongoing identification, implementation and evaluation of initiatives designed to improve service delivery;
- Analyses resources and clinical implications for alternative approaches to improve service delivery;

- Contributes to social work evidence base with regards to systems and organisational theory, action research and the role of social work in clinical practice;
- Plays a key role in organisational change processes and advocates where there might be negative impact on clients;
- Identifies the need for change in wider societal systems and actively contributes to social change and justice seeking where possible and/or raises this appropriately for consideration and possible action by the AASW and other internal and external key stakeholders.

***Ability 4g: Undertakes consultation, support, advocacy, supervision and debriefing with other agencies and services with the client in mind***

- Demonstrates advanced communication skills when advocating with or on behalf of clients;
- Undertakes all communication with other agencies with the consent of clients, unless exempted by law or using a de-identified example.

***Ability 4h: Evaluates the effectiveness of services with clients and adjusts service provision accordingly***

- Demonstrates advanced skills in articulating quantitative and qualitative outcome measures with clients to ensure transparency and accountability of interventions;
- Demonstrates advanced practice in facilitation of complex treatment reviews, family and carer meetings, case conferences, facilitation of multidisciplinary team reviews while incorporating clinical outcome measures to inform planning where appropriate.

***Ability 4i: Terminates or renegotiates service provision when the relationship no longer serves the interests of the client and/or where a conflict of interest becomes evident***

- Demonstrates ability to maintain therapeutic alliance in challenging engagement with clients;
- Identifies any possible conflict of interest or boundary overlap with respect to a client or agency and refers on if required;
- Can articulate clinically indicated rationale for termination or transfer of client;
- Facilitates a therapeutic discharge or transition of care for clients;
- Actively seeks professional supervision and review around conflicts of interest and transfer or termination plan.

***Ability 4j: Records and manages information in accordance with ethical principles and relevant legislation***

- Demonstrates advanced knowledge and application of privacy and confidentiality legislation;
- Can articulate the legislative framework that relates to practicing in their clinical domain;
- Effectively manages clinical documentation, data and records with rigour and compliance to policy and legislation;
- Demonstrates expertise, knowledge and ability to advise in relation to the AASW Code of Ethics, Practice Standards and Practice Guidelines;
- Demonstrates advanced practice with critical reflection and governance of ethical dilemmas and management;

- Assertively manages complex legislation requirements seeking consultation and interpretations when required;
- Demonstrates compliance with clinical escalation policy and procedures.

***Ability 4k: Actively seeks client feedback, both informally and formally, to inform service provision and enhance own professional development***

- Is involved in developing, implementing and evaluating client engagement initiatives;
- Actively seeks engagement and feedback from clients, their families/carers and the community where appropriate;
- Provides advanced interpersonal skills to ensure a safe and effective environment for clients to provide feedback;
- Provides mechanisms for private and confidential feedback systems to clients, their families and the community;
- Completes professional development plans and reviews with clinical supervisor to address any areas of development or need;
- Contributes to social work evidence base with regards to holistic and person-centred approaches to client engagement.

***Ability 4l: Actively engages in processes of professional reflective practice to continuously consider use of self, enhance understanding of clients' concerns and make use of opportunities for lifelong learning***

- Reflects on experiences with clients;
- Rigorously examines assumptions and their meanings;
- Considers the dynamics of power in clients' concerns;
- Considers values and ethics in professional behaviours;
- Reviews theories and research relevant to clients' concerns;
- Develops new ways of practicing to enhance client wellbeing.

***Ability 4m: Actively engages in high quality clinical supervision around cases to ensure clinical accountability and transparency in practice, as well as opportunity to identify areas for clinical growth***

- Prepares for and regularly participates in clinical supervision according to AASW supervision standards;
- Committed to pursuing additional Continual Professional Development (CPD) to further develop specialised psychosocial interventions that address complexity;
- Seeks clinical supervision that challenges their practice and approach and ensures reflective and evaluative practice;
- Considers supervision options that may include internal supervision from within an agency and/or an ongoing external supervision with an ongoing mentor/supervisor.



## CAPABILITY FIVE

### Advocates for legislative, policy and practice reform within the context of their role and clinical area

#### SKILL INDICATORS

- Identifies areas for service improvement and advocates within their own service sector to ensure effective practice in response to client concerns.
- Engages appropriately in activities designed to increase awareness of issues pertaining to client wellbeing and within service organisations and the broader community.
- Engages in networks, coalitions and collaborations focusing on policy and legislative reform.
- Identifies systemic gaps and makes recommendations to government on policy and practice reforms required to more effectively and efficiently provide services.

#### ***Ability 5a: Maintains current knowledge of policy and legislation and how they impact on the clients, their community and environment.***

- Articulates how and why particular policies are relevant to social work practice within a clinical setting;
- Contributes to the development of organisational and AASW policies and procedures;
- Engages in professional development activities around policy development, implementation and analysis;
- Advocates where policies are not in alignment with social work values, client needs and social justice principles;
- Evaluates the effectiveness of procedures and work instructions;
- Advocates for social workers to be involved in the analysis of policy.

#### ***Ability 5b: Appropriately works with others to achieve legislative and policy reform as informed by client need and clinical experience***

- Promotes the implementation of policies that are in alignment with social work values, client needs and social justice principles within the sector.

#### ***Ability 5c: Makes recommendations to government on policy and practice reforms***

- Engages with and contributes to submissions and policy statements in collaboration with clients, colleagues, sector leaders and the AASW;
- Champions the profession and practice of social work within opportunities for influence in government and other contexts.

