

AASW Disability Capability Statement

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AASW

Australian Association
of Social Workers

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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 the 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 Disability Social Worker Capability Statement 2020 articulates the capabilities required for specialised disability social work practice.

These capabilities apply to disability 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 statement provides detail on the capabilities that need elaboration in the disability 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 disability capability framework will depend upon the social worker's experience, practice setting and role.

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

Overview of the Disability Field

Social workers engage and support people with disability in many contexts. Therefore, the task of unpacking specialised practice takes us to many places and settings, beyond specialist disability agencies to hospital emergency rooms, prisons, community services and many more. Even within specialist disability services, there are differences in knowledge and skills required for practice, for example, in rehabilitation units, employment support services and disability agencies providing support for community living.

The overarching framework for understanding disability acknowledges the significance of impairment and social structures and processes, and the interactions between these that cause disability and impact on the lives of people with disabilities and their families. Thus, social workers need to recognise the implications of different types of impairments, physical, sensory, psychosocial and cognitive, whether acquired or developmental, as well other social, cultural or economic factors that affect the wellbeing of people with disabilities.

Several crosscutting themes can be identified for social work practice in disability. The complexity of our practice is reflected in the need to:

- pursue approaches to practice at the level of individuals, families, communities and broader policy
- understand the interplay of individual, community and broader social factors on the lived experience of people with disabilities
- recognise the significance or otherwise of the specific nature of impairment on lived experiences of people with disability
- take account of the significance of life course stage to lived experiences of disability including the disenfranchised grief and loss associated with different life stages for the individual and the family
- appreciate the significant and substantial role of families in supporting and optimising the lives of people with disability
- recognise the significance of co-morbidities and the impact of chronic and complex disabilities and medical conditions leading to family stress and increased psychosocial impacts
- be aware of the wide spectrum and differences in severity of some impairments and the consequent differing impacts for people with disability and their families
- draw upon the different types of knowledge that inform practice – lived experience, research, theoretical and practice wisdom
- recognise differences in attitudes and responses to disability across cultures
- identify and respond to the impacts for people with disability at the intersections of different policy arenas such as housing, health, education and social security
- operate within the context of multi- and interdisciplinary teams as well as sole practitioners
- prepare complex assessments and written reports.

Specific Roles for Social Workers in the National Disability Insurance Scheme

As outlined briefly in the Overview, work in the disability field includes many practice contexts and roles. The roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme has created new roles and opportunities for social work practitioners especially those who are Accredited Disability Social Workers.

Accredited Disability Social Workers will have the knowledge, skills and expertise to fulfil many roles within the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Roles for Accredited Disability social workers include those within the National Disability Insurance Agency itself as well as those specific roles and services that are funded under the scheme. Accredited social workers will also have the requisite expertise to become registered providers across many of the following roles.

Roles within the NDIA

Local Area Coordinator

Local Area Coordinators (LACs) work closely with people with disability and their families to identify current and future supports that are needed to realise the person's goals and aspirations and to have a good life. This work often involves complex conversations and a deep understanding of the impacts of disability. LACs also work alongside people with disability and families to build capacity to exercise choice and control and strengthen networks with local organisations and communities. Part of this work also involves working with mainstream and local organisations to raise awareness and improve opportunities for people with disability to participate in their local community.

Planner

Planners work with participants and their families or representatives to gather information, identify support options across mainstream, informal and community networks and determine NDIS funded supports that can be included in participants' plans. Planners work cooperatively with all partners to ensure plans are successfully implemented. They also undertake plan reviews.

Other NDIA roles

Other roles in the agency that are suited to Accredited Social Workers may include working in quality assurance, leading teams and policy work.

Roles for registered providers

The NDIS has created many new roles more broadly in the disability sector. Accredited Disability Social workers have all the skills, knowledge and abilities to provide many of these services and are especially equipped to fulfil specialised services. Accredited Disability Social workers can be employed by non-government agencies in these roles or increasingly, provide these services as

private practitioners. Social workers can be registered through the NDIS to provide the following supports.

Registration Groups

The NDIS provides a comprehensive list of registration groups covering many roles and services. Registration Groups are based on the skills and compliance obligations required to deliver the support. Social workers are eligible to provide many services such as:

1. **Assistance to Access and Maintain Employment or higher education [Assist Access/Maintain Employ]**. Supporting participants to secure employment, provide necessary support and training to maintain their job or provide supports for specialised Supported Employment.
2. **Group and Centre Based Activities [Group/Centre Activities]**. Supporting people to participate in group-based community, social and recreational activities.
3. **Assistance in coordinating or managing life stages, transition and supports [Assist-Life Stage, Transition]**. This involves assisting people to coordinate their supports, to make the transition to living independently and participating in community.
4. **Accommodation/Tenancy Assistance [Accommodation/Tenancy]**. This involves providing assistance and advocacy to secure and maintain housing.

Professional Registration Groups

In addition to the general registration groups, the NDIS includes several professional groups which can be provided only by people with a higher level of qualification (e.g. social work, psychology, occupational therapists and other allied health professionals). These professional registration groups are specifically well suited to Accredited Disability Social Workers.

1. **Specialist Positive Behaviour Support [Behaviour Support]**. Behaviour support creates person-centred and individualised strategies for people with disability to reduce the occurrence and impact of behaviours of concern and minimises the use of restrictive practices. Key to this support is safeguarding the dignity and quality of life of people with disability who require such specialist support.
2. **Early Intervention Supports for Early Childhood [Early Childhood Supports]**. These supports are for children aged 0-6 years who have a developmental delay or disability and their families and/or carers. The practitioner supports families to help their children develop the skills they need to take part in ordinary daily activities in order to optimise the best possible outcomes later in life.
3. **Support Co-ordination**. This is designed to assist people to get the most out of their NDIS funding plan. Support coordinators help participants to build capacity to connect with supports and to coordinate these supports by building skills, ensuring the right mix of supports are being provided for the person to achieve their goals. Specialist support coordination is a higher level of service for people with more complex and specialist needs.

4. **Therapeutic supports.** These supports cover a range of therapy services provided by health professionals including physiotherapy, speech pathology, dietetics etc. Accredited Disability social workers are qualified to provide to provide specialist counselling, specific supports in finding and keeping a job and in multidisciplinary teamwork. Demonstrates the ability and practices to build productive, effective and ethical relationships in the context of working with vulnerable children and families, communities, other professionals and key stakeholders

Capability 1: Knowledge of theoretical, legislative policy and practice frameworks

Ability 1a: Demonstrates theoretical understandings of disability

- Knowledge of the different models of disability including social, critical realist, World Health Organisation International Classification of Functioning, Disability & Health (ICF) framework, individual and medical, biopsychosocial models and how these are applied in practice
- Detailed understanding of the differences between deficit frameworks versus the ability of the individual to participate socially and economically to the best of their abilities
- Critical understanding of the sources of knowledge and evidence in this field including lived experience, expert professional, research, and theory and how these are applied and integrated in practice
- Critical awareness of the various tools used for disability screening, diagnosis and assessment techniques, their strengths and limitations
- Person-centred and rights-based practice frameworks and skills in their application
- Knowledge of the significance of family and other informal support and the implications of the absence of such supports and relationships
- Knowledge of different types and severity of impairments and their impact on lived experience.

Ability 1b: Demonstrates comprehensive knowledge of the various contexts for practice

1b.1 Policy

Knowledge Indicators

- Demonstrates critical knowledge and understanding of the policy environments, drivers and tensions at:
 - International level (particularly United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability)
 - National level (especially in relation to the National Disability Strategy and National Disability Insurance Scheme)
 - State and territory levels (particularly legislation and policies in relation to guardianship, anti-discrimination, health, education, training and employment, and criminal justice and forensic processes)
- Understanding of how policies may be shaped by neoliberalism and marketisation forces, which, in turn, shape performance cultures within organisations
- Understanding of the inherent tensions in policy interfaces between specialist and mainstream services and different levels of government.

Skill Indicators

- Demonstrates skills in:
 - Sourcing policies relevant to disability
 - Critical policy analysis
 - Providing input to policy development
 - Mobilising others to participate in the policy process
 - Advocacy on behalf of others in the policy process.

1b.2 Service Systems

Knowledge Indicators

- Demonstrates knowledge of service systems and programs across the following dimensions:
 - Federal and state governments
 - Specialist and mainstream services
 - Government and non-government organisations including private and not-for-profit sectors
 - National Disability Insurance Agency and other services supporting individualised funding
 - Organisational context for practice
 - Quality service standards
 - Compulsory third-party rehabilitation arrangements.

Skill Indicators

- Demonstrates skills in:
 - Providing information
 - Navigation of service systems
 - Identifying gaps in service delivery
 - Enabling access to and utilisation of these systems for clients
 - Critical analysis of these systems to contribute to their improvement and to help the person with a disability and their families to understand the context they are now experiencing.

1b.3 Purpose of social work practice in disability

Knowledge Indicators

- Demonstrates deep understanding of the concept of quality-of-life domains and their measurement
- Demonstrates understanding of the tensions that arise in balancing quality of life across the person with disability, their family, other service users, and communities.

Skill Indicators

- Demonstrates ability to articulate how quality of life is manifested in person's lived experiences
- Demonstrates skills in applying the quality of life concept to each individual in assessment and intervention.

Capability 2: Engagement

Knowledge Indicators

- Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the person in their social context
- Demonstrates knowledge of and utilisation of ecosystemic frameworks that include family members and others and incorporates working with groups
- Demonstrates ability to identify when a client in mainstream services has a disability and further ability to modify support delivery so that the client experiences a service equitable to a non-disabled client
- Demonstrate understanding of the roles that groups play in people's lives, e.g. self-advocacy, peer support and social groups.

Skill Indicators

- Building equitable relationships of trust and connection where people feel safe, and workers create sufficient time for deep listening, shared activities and long-term engagement
- Relationship mapping and environmental mapping
- Communication skills – capacity to modify communication style and techniques, capacity to interpret the multimodal communication of the person
- Build appropriate relationships with family members, individuals, peers, communities and other services and social institutions, policymakers
- Capacity building with families to support the social inclusion, rights, dignity of risk for their family member.

Working with Groups

- Specific capacity to enable without taking over; include every individual in the conversation, find language and processes that support participation, instigate forms of decision-making that work for the group, adopting language that members can understand
- Supporting people with disability to take on group processes and procedures, e.g. small group activities, resolve conflict and disputes, having fun, recognise limitations, refreshments, options to draw answers, role plays and drama.

Engagement with Policy Holders

- Supporting people with disabilities to participate in reference groups, boards, government committees where policy is made.
- Facilitate change in representation processes so that they can be more inclusive for people with disabilities.
- Engage with and change institutional structures so that people with disability are included in these.

Capability 3: Knowledge and skills for key practice areas

Ability 3a: Social inclusion and belonging

Knowledge Indicators

- Demonstrates knowledge of different social inclusion frameworks and the implications for practice
- Demonstrates an understanding of the opportunities for social inclusion across a range of life domains
- Demonstrates an understanding of the tensions between normalisation and choice of social inclusion
- Demonstrates knowledge of the barriers to inclusion at individual and structural levels (e.g. transport, finances, attitudes, physical access, digital divide).

Skill Indicators

- Supporting people in mainstream groups, active mentoring, models of supported employment other types of social groups etc.
- Recognise enabling support practices such as active support, and facilitate and support the delivery of quality support in settings for people with disabilities
- Name, share and celebrate quality support
- Devise strategies to overcome barriers to transport, access etc. working partnership with the person and other stakeholders.

Ability 3b: Excellence in case management and coordination

Knowledge Indicators

- Knowledge of the various models of support planning and case management across different service contexts
- Knowledge of different lenses to inform interventions – systems and evidence about interventions and systems and resources. What are the characteristics of good services
- Support planning – whole of life.

Skill Indicators

- Understanding the person in social context and potential trajectories
- Being responsive and flexible in interventions to reflect changing needs and issues e.g. over the life course
- Applying different theoretical lenses to the problems, opportunities and challenge
- Resource raising, prioritising and allocating
- Identifying systemic issues
- Assessing service support and quality

- Pushing organisational boundaries
- Support with participation in decision-making.

Ability 3c: Ethical issues – practice dilemmas

Knowledge Indicators

- Knowledge of ethical issues, problems and dilemmas
- Knowledge of the approaches to resolving practice of dilemmas
- Knowledge of ethics applicable to the disability sector (working with vulnerable people cards, Quality and Safeguards framework for NDIS etc.).

Skill Indicators

- Identifying the dilemma and contradicting values
- Applying frameworks to resolve practice dilemmas
- Supporting people with disabilities and families to work through their own ethical dilemmas
- Seek to safeguard the rights, interests and safety of the client with impaired decision-making capacity at all times.

Ability 3d: The law

This encompasses the criminal justice system, victims and offenders, the prison system, guardianship, supported decision-making, child protection social security, Administrative Appeals Tribunal, family law, sexual rights and anti-discrimination. This also includes the National Disability Insurance Scheme legislation and requirements under the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Commission.

Knowledge Indicators

- Knowledge of the relevant legislation and its various instruments and their impacts on people with disabilities families community etc. across different jurisdictions – federal, state etc.
- Knowledge of specific areas – guardianship, decision-making, NDIS, disability discrimination, social security, criminal justice system, family law, tenancy, child protection, advanced care planning, electoral law.

Skill Indicators

- Find, read, interpret and explain legislation
- Engage with people with disabilities and support their decision-making about legal issues
- Support interaction with legal systems
- Find and engage legal advice and services
- Advocacy with instruments of the law and criminal justice system
- Recognise the potential of the law for social change and justice and working across disciplines.

Ability 3e: Advocacy

Knowledge Indicators

- Knowledge of the various forms of advocacy – individual, systemic and self/group, professional
- Knowledge of the approaches to advocacy
- Knowledge of the system, policy processes and cycles, and the implications for people with disabilities and their families
- Awareness of the importance of advocacy in disability practice

Skill Indicators

- Building collaborations with other stakeholders
- Identifying the issues
- Being targeted in issues, timing and who to impact
- Understanding where power lies
- Going with the answer and using judgement to challenge the answer appropriately
- Advocating on multiple fronts
- Using appropriate approach for stage of the campaign not oppositional in the first instance
- Having capacity for joint advocacy efforts
- Working alongside not taking over – that is, stepping forward and stepping back when appropriate
- Developing/enabling leadership and acknowledging legitimacy of people with disability in advocacy efforts.

Ability 3f: Complexity and intersectionality

Knowledge Indicators

- Knowledge of how the disadvantages arising from social responses to disability are intertwined and mutually reinforced by other forms of social inequalities
- Knowledge of multiple sources of social and structural disadvantage experienced by many people with disabilities and how disability impacts on these, e.g. poverty, cultural and linguistic diversity, Indigeneity, unemployment, intergenerational disadvantage, gender, age, and class
- Knowledge of impact of multiple disabilities experienced by significant subgroups – cognitive and mental health; physical and mental, physical and cognitive, psychosocial and/or the effects of drug and alcohol misuse or dependence on disabilities
- Knowledge of the significance of culture to disability and the diversity of norms, values and beliefs regarding disability
- Systemic challenges to working with and responding to people with multiple and complex needs
- Knowledge of the causes, prevalence and interventions around complex and challenging behaviour

- Understanding the impacts on families of having more than one member with disabilities.

Skill Indicators

- See all engagement, case management, advocacy and legal skills
- Prioritising points of intervention
- Critical thinking and constant questioning of assumptions made about people with disabilities
- Working across and coordinating multiple systems and the community
- Crisis intervention
- Flexibility, persistence to work with limited resources
- Ability to maintain a clear understanding of human rights
- Training and supervision of support staff and education of mainstream service staff.

Ability 3g: Social work leadership

Demonstrates understanding and participates in delivery of education and training to cross sector and multidisciplinary practitioners.

Knowledge Indicators

- Demonstrates knowledge of supervisory processes values and strategies and operation in disability and mainstream services (critical thinking, communication and relationship building. Managing conflict and resolution, time and priority management problem solving etc.)
- Demonstrates knowledge of team leadership and lead professional development in disability field of practice.

Skill Indicators

- Provides effective and professional supervision for students on disability related field placements
- Provides consultation services, support, and debriefing to entry level workers to engage with individuals with disabilities and their families
- See skills in Complexity and intersectionality
- Operate effectively, provide leadership within multi-agency and inter-professional partnerships and settings raise awareness and lead discussion on issues of disabilities and its implication to service delivery and policy.



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