

# Review of AASW Practice Standards

## Consultation Paper 2021

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### 1.1 Introduction

Social work is a growing and rapidly evolving profession and workplace contexts are increasingly diverse. Professional standards are living documents that need to be responsive to changed contexts. AASW is engaged in strategic thinking about the ways in which the Association might anticipate developments in the social work workforce and workplace. It is considering strategies that will reshape the nature and scope of its activities to meet the new and emerging changes in the roles of social workers.

In the increasingly integrated workplace, health and social care professionals are working in direct collaboration with one another across more diverse contexts. The revised Standards (2021) will be a critical element in the strategy, ensuring and enhancing the professional standing of social workers in the immediate and long-term future.

The aim of this *Consultation Paper* is to seek the views from AASW Members and key stakeholders on the issues, challenges and opportunities for improvement in the *Practice Standards 2013*. AASW anticipates that significant changes may be needed to bring the Standards into alignment with contemporary practice in Australia and overseas and comparable with other registered and self-regulating allied professions.

The 2021 review continues the AASW strategy of aligning policy documents and processes, including the *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS)* and capability frameworks for several credentials.

### 1.2 Review Process

The review commenced in April 2021 with an expected completion date of October 2021. A consultant, Dr Craig McInnis (PhillipsKPA) will lead the process with advice from AASW officers and a Review Reference Group. AASW appreciates the need for the revised Standards to be widely accepted and supported by AASW Members, social workers and a wide range of stakeholders.

To achieve a high level of consensus, we will conduct a comprehensive consultation process. The approach is based on the assumption that a series of draft versions of the Standards will need to be developed and tested, with multiple and timely opportunities for member and stakeholder input over the duration of the project.

In addition to responses to the *Consultation Paper* the Review will seek input via:

- an online survey of members
- an online forum and feedback from the AASW Member Noticeboard
- interviews and focus groups.

### 1.3 Expected outcomes of the review

The review process is expected to provide an updated and contemporary set of standards while ensuring that the core values and components of the Standards are systematically addressed. It should encourage a forward-looking perspective, advance the future standing of the profession, and clearly differentiate social work from other professions. The Standards should be comparable with practice standards of other registered and self-regulating allied professions.

The Standards should also adequately describe what social workers do. The revised Code of Ethics describes in general terms *who* social workers are, and *what* they do. The revised Practice Standards will provide more specific guidance as to the *what*, and also *how* social workers are expected to apply their professional knowledge, skills and attributes.

The documents should crystallise the practice of social work for social workers, those who use their services, policy-makers, employers, and other professionals in the health and human services field.

The Standards must be aligned to, but be clearly distinguished from, the recently revised *Code of Ethics* (2020) and other key AASW documents. Duplication between and within documents should be avoided along with repetition and redundancy especially where that weakens overall coherence, logic and force of the Standards document.

### 1.4 Consultation Questions

- What should be the priorities for the review and improvement of the Standards?
- Are the expected outcomes of the review appropriate and sufficient?
- Has the purpose of the Standards changed in any way? Are they still needed? Are the current aims still relevant and adequate?
- Does the current structure of the Standards (Values, Responsibilities, Knowledge and Skills) adequately reflect the core skills of social workers and contemporary social work practice?
- Are there any new or emerging developments in Social Work practice that should be considered by the review?
- Do the responsibilities identified in the Standards adequately reflect what is required for effective practice? Is the level of detail appropriate?
- Are there additional responsibilities that should be included? Are there new risks and opportunities currently experienced by Social Workers that should be covered by the Standards?
- The Standards are intended to be relevant to all social workers, irrespective of practice, context, or years of experience. Do you think they achieve this?
- Are you aware of practice standards from other professions or jurisdictions that the Review would find useful to examine?
- Are there any other matters that the Review should cover?

# Relationship of AASW policy documents

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*Code of Ethics*

**Purpose:**

To identify the values and ethical principles that underpin social work practice, and to provide a guide as to what the profession expects of its members with respect to their conduct and fitness to practice.



*Practice Standards*

**Purpose:**

To describe what is required for effective, professional and accountable social work practice in all social work contexts. The *Practice Standards* inform and guide the *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS)*.



*Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS)*

**Purpose:**

To set the standards for social work education and to inform and guide curriculum development and expected graduate attributes for social work programs in



*Continuing Professional Development (CPD)*

**Purpose:**

The purpose of the AASW's CPD Policy is to ensure social workers maintain, improve and broaden the skills and knowledge required for effective and professional practice.

# The Code of Ethics (2020)

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The *Code of Ethics* underpins and informs all AASW documents and policies. It identifies the principles that underpin ethical social work practice and the professional identities of social workers. The *Code* has three parts:

Part 1. Code of Ethics. This identifies ethical principles focused on three core principles of respect for persons, social justice and professional integrity, and what they mean for social workers.

Part 2. Standards of Ethical Practice. These state in broad terms what the profession expects of its members with respect to their behaviour and conduct across all personal and professional activities.

Part 3: Fitness to Practice. This covers complaints and sanctions to guide AASW in deciding whether action is needed to protect the public in the event of allegations of ethical misconduct.

## **Describing what social workers do**

The *Code* provides the most recent description of what social workers do as formulated by the AASW Board with advice from members and an Expert Panel. It describes in general terms *who* social workers are, and *what* they do, that is:

Social workers operate at the interface between people and their social, cultural and physical environments. In all contexts, social workers maintain a dual focus on assisting human functioning and identifying the systemic issues that create inequity and injustice.

Our service users are individuals, families and other kinship arrangements, groups, partnerships communities, organisations and societies. We focus especially on those who are neglected, marginalised, vulnerable, excluded, disadvantaged, alienated or have exceptional needs.

Social work practice includes:

- action to address the personal difficulties of service users through casework, counselling, clinical intervention, work with individuals, families, partnerships, communities and groups
- research, social policy development, administration, management, consultancy, education, training, supervision and evaluation undertaken to further human wellbeing and social development.

Social work action embraces advocacy and policy reform initiatives to achieve equitable access to social, economic, environmental and political resources focused in particular on:

- raising awareness of structural and systemic inequities
- promoting policies and practices that achieve a fair allocation of social resources
- acting to bring about social or systemic change to reduce social barriers, inequality and injustice.

# The Practice Standards (2013)

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## **Purpose of the Standards**

“To outline what is required for effective, professional and accountable social work practice in all social work contexts. The Practice Standards inform and guide the Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards (ASWEAS).”

## **Aim of the Standards**

The aim of the standards is to provide:

- A guide to practice.
- A guide for planning ongoing professional development.
- A basis for applying standards across the diversity of practice in Australia.
- A basis of expected standards of practice.
- A guide for the assessment of practice.

## **Core values and ethical responsibilities**

Social work is committed to three core values which give rise to general and specific ethical responsibilities:

- Respect for persons
- Social justice
- Professional integrity

## **The Eight Practice Standards (2013)**

The current (2013) eight standards listed below identify what is required for effective, professional and accountable social work practice. Each general standard includes a number of specific standards, with detailed indicators that specify the requirements for meeting that standard.

### **1. Values and ethics**

- 1.1. Practice in accordance with the *Code of Ethics* (2010) (5 indicators)
- 1.2. Manage ethical dilemmas and issues arising in practice (5)

### **2. Professionalism**

- 2.1. Represent the social work profession with integrity and professionalism. (3)
- 2.2. Behave in a professional manner and be accountable for all actions and decisions. (8)

### **3. Culturally responsive and inclusive practice**

- 3.1. Work respectfully and inclusively with cultural difference and diversity. (7)
- 3.2. Respect, strive to understand and promote the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures. (6)

#### **4. Knowledge for practice**

- 4.1. Understand higher level systemic influences on people with respect to area of practice. (8)
- 4.2. Understand and articulate social work and other relevant theories and concepts. (3)
- 4.3. Understand the role of research and evaluation in obtaining and generating new knowledge for practice. (6)
- 4.4. Understand and articulate how and when theories, knowledge bases and knowledge sources inform practice. (4)

#### **5. Applying knowledge to practice**

- 5.1. Conduct an assessment and analysis of needs to inform the service being offered. (3)
- 5.2. Work collaboratively with relevant people. (4)
- 5.3. Use a range of specific social work methods and techniques appropriate to area of practice. (4)
- 5.4. Apply critical and reflective thinking to practice (4)

#### **6. Communication and interpersonal skills**

- 6.1. Effectively communicate with a diverse range of people. (3)
- 6.2. Effectively communicate the details and nature of the service offered to people. (2)
- 6.3. Effectively work with others in a team environment. (4)
- 6.4. Use information technology to communicate and provide services as appropriate. (3)

#### **7. Information recording and sharing**

- 7.1. Record and manage information appropriately. (4)
- 7.2. Keep and maintain information in accordance with ethical principles and relevant legislation. (5)

#### **8. Professional development and supervision**

- 8.1. Actively participate in professional supervision. (4)
- 8.2. Engage in continuing professional development as outlined in the AASW continuing professional development requirements. (4)
- 8.3. Contribute to education and professional development of others where appropriate. (4)

### **Social work areas of practice**

“Social work operates at the interface between people and their social, cultural and physical environments. Human needs are always seen in the context of socio-political and environmental factors. While social work practice is diverse, it can generally be broken up into the following areas of practice”:

- Work with individuals
- Work with families
- Work with groups
- Work with communities
- Social policy practice
- Management, leadership and administration
- Education and training
- Research and evaluation.

## Other related AASW documents

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A number of additional areas of specialisation and fields of practice provide detail on specific aspects of the *Practice Standards 2013* or potential standards indicators that apply in those contexts.

### **Graduate Attributes - ASWEAS 2020**

The ASWEAS Profession-specific Graduate Attributes are presented in full in **ASWEAS Appendix 1**. They are itemised under the eight Domains of Practice (matching the Practice Standards) and 23 supporting standards (2013). The indicators for the 23 supporting Practice Standards have been reformulated as 72 learning outcomes under the heading “evidence of ability”.

The Graduate Attributes specify entry level expectations of social workers against the Practice Standards listed under each of the Domain headings. Assessment of student performance against these eight Domains is central to ensuring that professional learning outcomes have been met and that graduating students are equipped to practise ethically and safely as beginner practitioners.

### **AASW Practice Standards for Mental Health Social Workers 2014**

The Practice Standards for Mental Health Social Workers 2014 directly align with the *Practice Standards 2013* as a compendium, with specific indicators to illustrate the requirements for mental health social workers. The standards also recognise and support private practice in social work.

### **AASW Scope of Practice Series**

The Scope of Practice series articulate and promote the role of professional social workers within fields of practice, and provide information about what employers and clients can expect. Social workers, policy makers, managers and academics can use the documents to articulate and promote the role of professional social workers in a particular field. The areas of practice include:

- Social work in homelessness
- Social work in family violence
- School social work
- Social work in hospitals
- Social work with refugees.

The following are currently being reviewed and updated:

- Social work in child protection
- Australian Defence Force (ADF) Service Members, Veterans, and their Families
- Social work in health
- Social work leadership and management
- Social work in mental health
- Social work in disability
- Social work in aged care.

In addition, the Scope of Social Work Practice – skills documents include:

- Social work and psychosocial assessments
- Social work and case management.

There are also other documents related to practice standards for specialist areas such as the *Australasian Clinical Practice Guidelines for Social Work in Cystic Fibrosis 2017*.