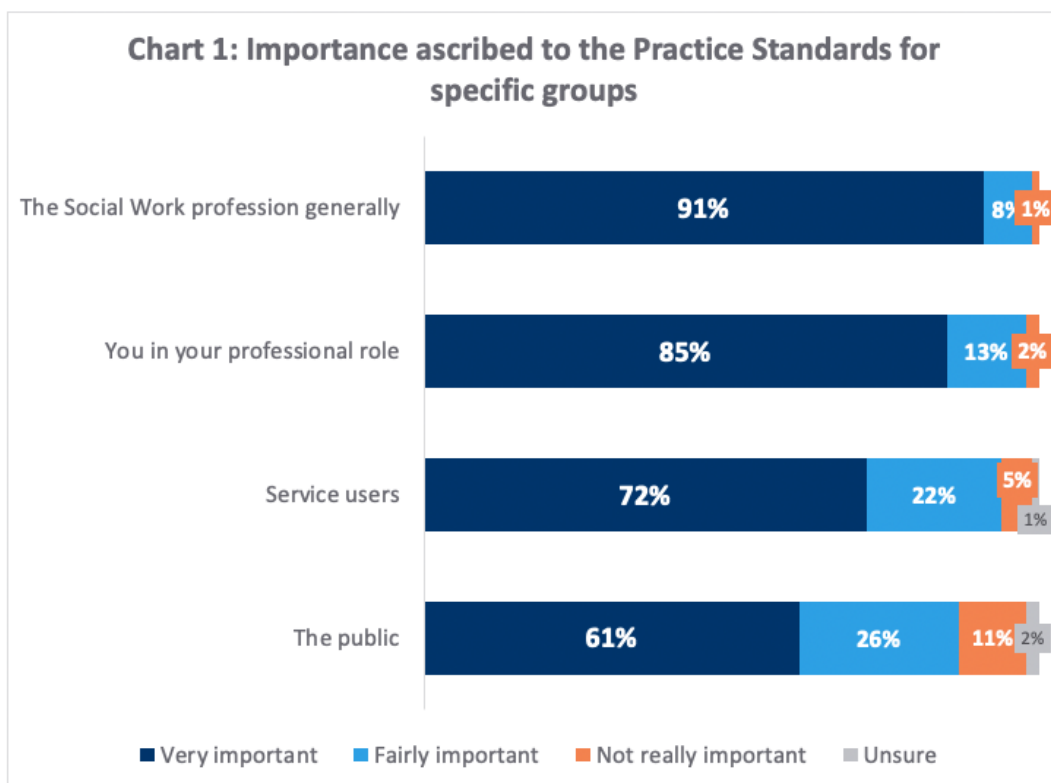


Findings of Member Survey

These notes are a summary of the findings from the survey conducted by Di Marzio Research for AASW. Members were sent an email on 17th August, 2021 informing them about the research and inviting them to participate in an online survey. A follow-up reminder email was sent on 27th August. The survey closed on Monday 30th August 2021. A total of 800 responses were received.

1.1 Significance and use of the Practice Standards

Importance ascribed to the Practice Standards for specific groups



01. In each case below, how important do you believe the Practice Standards are...?

Frequency of using the Practice Standards

- 56% use the Practice Standards at least occasionally
- 23% used the Standards frequently

One in three members used the Practice Standards in the last month and two in three have done so in the last six months. In all segments, a majority used the Practice Standards in the last six months,

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but this incidence declined with age. 72% of those aged under 45 used the Practice Standards in that period compared with 52% of those aged 65 plus.

Other segments displaying more recent use included:

- supervisors (71% in the last 6 months),
- members working in the education (89%) or school (75%) sectors, and
- those who practice in the fields of Disability (71%), Youth Services (71%) and Community Development (76%).

Usage in the last six months was highest for students (at 92%) with 70% of them using the Practice Standards in the last month.

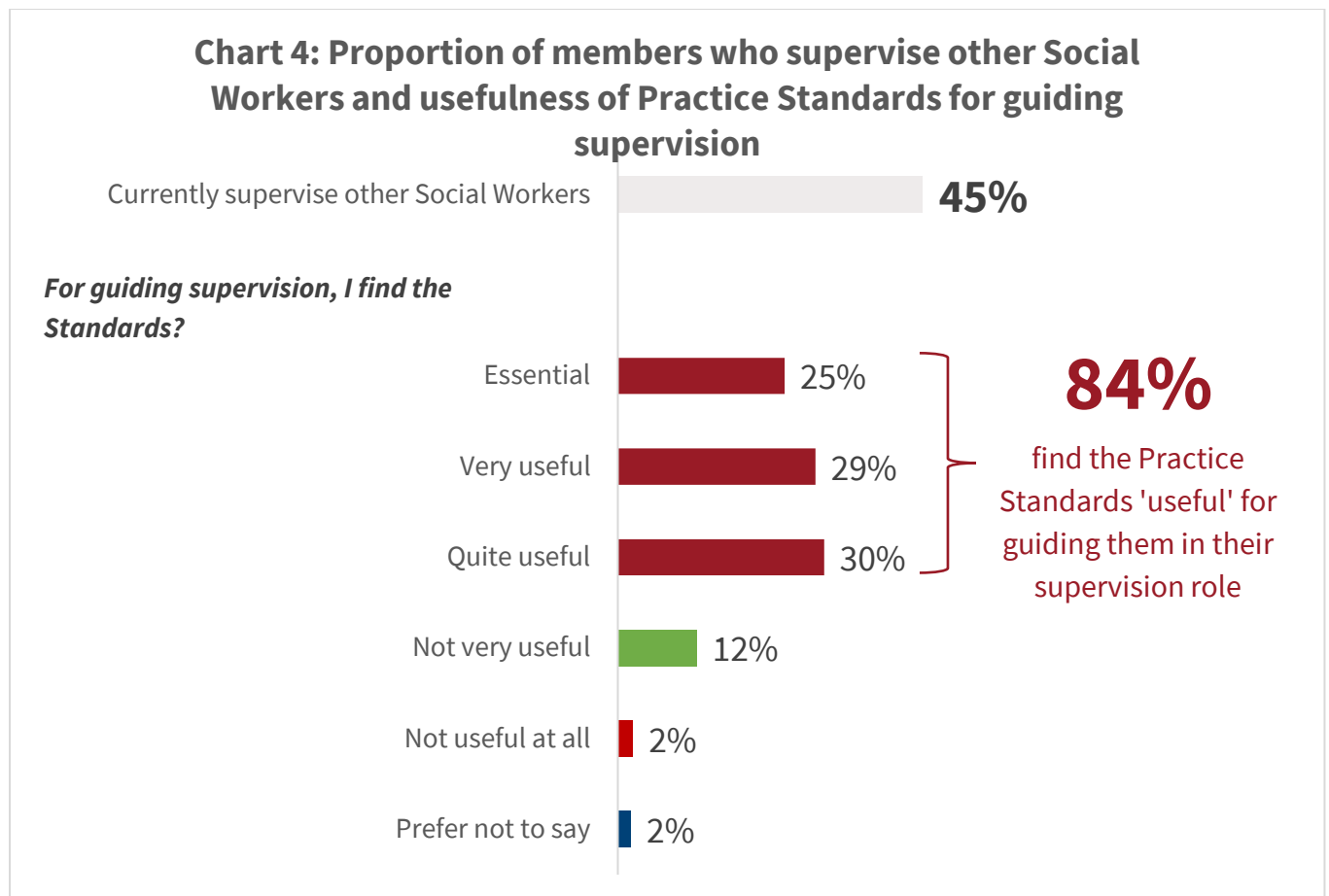
Reasons for using the Standards

Of all respondents the following purposes stood out:

- Answer questions / check something / info needed / for clarification, update (29% of mentions)
- Teaching / supervising, working with or mentoring or assessing students (23%)
- Ethics / Conflicts / Confidentiality issue/ Code of Conduct (12%)
- Research / studies /CPD (11%)
- Application/ Accreditation / Recognition (10%)
- Supervise / Coach / Mentor / Manage staff (8%)

1.2 Incidence of supervising Social Workers and perceived usefulness of Practice Standards for guiding supervision

Almost half of respondents (45%) supervise other Social Workers as part of their job. For guiding their supervision role, 55% find the Practice Standards either essential (25%), or very useful (29%). A substantial proportion of supervisors find them only quite useful (30%) and 14% find them not very, or not at all, useful for guiding supervision.



The older the member, the more likely they were to give one of those three responses. For instance, 95% of those aged 65 plus said the Practice Standards are 'useful' in this respect compared to 71% of those supervisors aged under 45. Nevertheless, in all segments the bulk of supervisors indicated that the Practice Standards are 'useful' for guiding their supervision role.

1.3 Fit for purpose - are the Practice Standards doing what they are supposed to do?

While most members agree the Standards generally do what they are supposed to do, the results do not demonstrate a strong vote of member confidence in the extent to which the Standards are currently fit for purpose.

- Less than half the members strongly believe that the standards enhance the standing of the profession or that they are relevant to all social workers.
- Less than a third are strongly of the view that the aims are still relevant, or that they reflect their core skills and contemporary practice.
- Less than a quarter are fully in agreement that the document adequately describes the minimal standards currently required for performance and accountability. The pattern of responses is reflected in all member segments.

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1.4 Amount of detail in the Practice Standards

Nearly two thirds (62%) of members surveyed believe there is the right amount of detail in the Practice Standards. The rest were more inclined to say there is 'too little' (18%) rather than 'too much' detail (11%) with one in ten not sure.

In nearly all member segments, more than 60% feel the amount of detail is about right. The most likely segments of the 18% who say 'too little detail' are:

- the under 45s (around 25%),
- members of 5 years standing or less (22%),
- those in the Government (22%) and Education (25%) sectors,
- members whose area of practice is Health (22%).

1.5 How well do the Practice Standards capture the practice of social work?

This question was asked about eight specific groups. There was a distinctly greater tendency for members to believe the Practice Standards capture the practice of social work for each group 'well' rather than 'not so well'.

In particular around 80% or more believe the practice of social work is captured well for Social Workers (88%), social work students (84%) and potential entrants to the profession (78%). The responses are not a clear endorsement of how well the Standards reflect the work of the profession to its members, students and potential entrants.

The responses are even much less positive for the relevant stakeholder groups. Less than a quarter of respondents consider the Standards to be effective in representing the practice of Social Work to employers, policy makers and other professionals in related fields.

Less than 20 percent of respondents clearly believe that the Standards are very effective in conveying the work roles of social workers to service users and the public generally.

1.6 Are additions, deletions or changes desired to the Practice Standards?

There was a mixed response to this which suggests there is a desire for amendments to be made. although 42% did not know if amendments were needed. This may suggest they were not familiar with the details of the standards or did not have any particular issues with them. Member segments who stood out in saying 'yes' include:

- those working in education (50%),
- supervisors (46%)

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- leadership/management (41%)
- those in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (45%) and Community Development (43%) areas of practice.

Among those saying 'yes', additions (85%) were far more likely to be mentioned than deletions (8%) or changes/amendments (34%). This was true across the member base who answered 'yes'. Regarding changes/amendments suggested, only three key themes emerged with calls for simplification dominating the feedback:

- Simplified, simpler language, clearer, less detailed, more contemporary, more example
- Related to specific groups like Disabled, ATSI, LGBTQIA, Students
- More on ethics, ethical issues and dilemmas

1.7 New or emerging developments that should be addressed in the Practice Standards?

This open-ended question generated responses from 423 members reflecting themes such as:

- Specific practice areas (19% of the mentions)
 - Complexity of work (18%)
 - Private Practice (15%)
 - Technologies (10%)
- COVID impact on work practices
 - work from home,
 - client contact,
 - on ethics,
- Self-care (9%)
- NDIS (9%)
- Climate change / Environment (9%):
- Remote work, telehealth, e-health (7%)
- Diversity (5%)

1.8 An Overall Assessment

Although it is more likely to be occasional rather than frequent, use of the Practice Standards is widespread across the AASW member base and for a variety of reasons. This reflects a generally high degree of importance ascribed to the Practice Standards by members not just for themselves and their profession but also for service users and the public.

Even though members may point out that the Standards do not provide employers, service users and the public with a clear picture of what Social Work practice involves, they believe the Practice

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Standards hold them accountable across all social work contexts, including those groups. Importantly they are also seen to influence quality of service and give credibility, guidance and identity to Social Workers. Two quotes below sum up these views:

“They hold us accountable to our clients, public, profession and ourselves. They also identify who we are and where we differ from many other groups by making the values and ethics so explicit.”

"They provide a framework for ethical, professional, knowledge and skill-based practice. They are essential to the quality of any profession, no less Social Work."

As indicated above, use of the Practice Standards, mostly ‘occasional’, is common for all member segments but they appear to play the most significant role in education and training, career development and management. This is because their use by supervisors, educators and students and those aged under 45 tends to stand out above others. The Standards are used in accredited programs as a reference point for student learning and professional socialisation. Regarding supervisors of social workers specifically, it is instructive that more than eight in ten of them find the Practice Standards ‘useful’ for guiding their supervisory role with 25% saying the Standards are ‘essential’ and 29% saying ‘very useful’.

Most members believe the Practice Standards are doing what they are supposed to do, and capture the practice of social work either very well or fairly well for different stakeholders, particularly those most invested in social work. Opinions of the Practice Standards are quite positive on key dimensions measured such as relevance, reflecting their core skills, enhancing the standing of the profession and describing minimal standards of work approach and performance. Despite this generally favourable assessment by members, they also readily see scope for improvement in several respects.

If the aspiration is for the Practice Standards to capture the practice of social work ‘very well’ rather than ‘fairly well’ then for all stakeholders of interest, that aim has only been achieved at a minority level according to members surveyed. This points to plenty of work needed to improve perceptions and knowledge about the Practice Standards in all targets.

One in three members feel changes are needed to the Practice Standards, most likely additions in a range of areas rather than deletions or amendments. The suggested additions reflect calls for:

- simplification,
- greater clarity, and
- a more contemporary set of standards particularly in terms of:
 - the diversity in our society,

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- different types of social work and social workers,
- impact of technology and the digital environment we now find ourselves in
- climate change
- a range of topical issues.

Such themes were also evident when responding to the question about new and emerging developments to be addressed in the Practice Standards together with increased attention needed for specific practice areas and about the complexity of work facing the profession now.