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PREAMBLE

- Social workers acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the First Australians, whose lands, winds and waters we all now share, and pay respect to their unique values, and their continuing and enduring cultures which deepen and enrich the life of our nation and communities.
- Social workers commit to acknowledge and understand the historical and contemporary disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the implication of this for social work practice.
- Social workers are responsible for ensuring that their practice is culturally competent, safe and sensitive.
1. CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK

The Code of Ethics (2010) outlines the context of all social work practice and states the following:

- **Definition of social work**

The social work profession in Australia adheres to the definition of social work jointly agreed to by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and International Association of Schools of Social Work in 2001:

*The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance wellbeing. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.*

- **Commitment and aims of social work**

As articulated in the AASW Code of Ethics (2010), the social work profession in Australia is committed to: the pursuit and maintenance of human wellbeing; the maximisation of human potential and the fulfilment of human needs.

- **The practice of social work**

Social work operates at the interface between people and their social, cultural and physical environments.

In all contexts, social workers maintain a dual focus on assisting people to engage constructively and effectively in the world. They will identify and address strategically the systemic issues that create inequity and injustice. In order to achieve these ends, social workers establish collaborative relationships with multiple stakeholders with different and sometimes conflicting perspectives and priorities.

The social work profession recognises that social work takes place in a context whereby social systems have a mutually interdependent relationship with the natural environment.

The social work profession recognises its responsibility to contribute to and support the local, national and international social work community.
2. PURPOSE OF THE PRACTICE STANDARDS

The purpose of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) Practice Standards for Social Workers (the Standards) is to outline what is expected of all social workers’ practice. The Standards are generic and apply to all social workers across all practice contexts and levels of experience.

The Standards are structured in a way that set out, in purposeful order, the higher level values and responsibilities required to inform and contribute to effective practice, as well as the core knowledge and essential skills required to practice effectively.

They outline what clients, employers, other professionals and the public can expect of social workers and inform social workers’ practice in complex and ambiguous situations that require professional judgments within the specific practice context.

The Standards inform and relate to social workers’ practice in complex and ambiguous situations that require professional judgements.

3. DEFINITION OF CLIENT

The Code of Ethics 2010 provides the definition of ‘client’ used in these Standards:

Clients are individuals, families and other kinship arrangements, groups, communities, organisations and societies, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged, alienated or have exceptional needs.

4. SOCIAL WORK VALUES

Three core values, as identified in the Code of Ethics 2010, inform social workers’ practice and give rise to general and specific ethical and practice responsibilities. The values integral to all social work practice at all levels are:

- Respect for persons
- Social Justice
- Professional Integrity
5. RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

- **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT** (Continuing professional development, supervision, reflective practice and research)

The social worker will:

- Demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning by keeping skills and knowledge up to date
- Recognise and respond in a dynamic and flexible way to changing practice contexts, environments and changes to society.
- Participate in supervision where appropriate
- Undertake ongoing professional development to expand knowledge and skill level
- Continually reflect on practice and identify areas for improvement/development
- Keep up to date with the latest research and knowledge in relevant fields to inform practice

- **SELF AWARENESS**

The social worker will:

- Know the limits of their practice and when to seek advice/refer to another professional
- Understand the importance of maintaining their own health and wellbeing and have strategies to do so
- Establish personal and professional boundaries in their practice
- Manage the emotional impact of their work and seeks support where necessary
- Be critically self aware by practicing reflectively and reflexively

- **ACCOUNTABILITY**

The social worker will:

- Recognise their personal responsibility for, and can justify, their decisions and recommendations
- Recognise their commitment and responsibility to their clients, colleagues, workplace and the social work profession
6. KNOWLEDGE FOR EFFECTIVE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

CORE SOCIAL WORK KNOWLEDGE

The social worker will demonstrate:

- sound understanding of social work ethics, values and human rights to guide professional practice
- knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ways of knowing
- understanding of culture, equity and diversity and their impact on self and clients
- knowledge and understanding of their cultural values and experiences and the impact on their practice.
- knowledge of underlying social work values, theories and concepts to inform practice
- knowledge of underlying theories and concepts from other related disciplines and how these align and differ from social work theory and concepts.
- specific knowledge for their area of practice
- understanding of the social construction of human experiences, behaviours and issues
- understanding that clients bring different knowledge and experiences to situations
- understanding of the impact of socio-political, economic and environmental factors on individuals, communities and groups
- understanding of the impact of inequality, disadvantage and discrimination
- knowledge of the micro and macro levels of policy and social systems and their impacts
- knowledge and understanding of the legislative context of their practice
7. SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

- CRITICAL REFLECTION SKILLS

The social worker will:

1. Critically analyse their area of practice with respect to power, disadvantage and socio-political factors – at all levels
2. Utilise skills in advocacy, mediation, negotiation, decision making, conflict resolution and facilitation to act in a client’s best interests and to challenge and address oppression and discrimination
3. Work with others to promote social justice, equality and inclusion.
4. Challenge and addresses the impact of discrimination, disadvantage and oppression
5. Identify and recognise organisational systems and procedures which may be oppressive or discriminatory and advocates for change
6. Locate their social work practice in a personal, cultural and structural context

- RELATIONAL SKILLS (Communication and interpersonal skills, team work and providing supervision)

The social worker will:

- Effectively communicate with a wide audience including clients, colleagues, managers, organisations and other stakeholders.
- Work effectively as part of a multi-disciplinary team and negotiate respectfully with colleagues
- Consistently demonstrate active listening skills
- Demonstrate well developed conflict management and problem solving skills
- Collaborate effectively with workers from other agencies
- Effectively engage with and includes clients in decision making processes where possible – including involuntary clients.
- Inform clients of agency/self employment policy and procedure in relation to confidentiality (and limits to), privacy, case note recording, limitations of the service and professional boundaries.
- Ensure that supervision serves administrative, educational and supportive functions
• **SOCIAL POLICY SKILLS**

The social worker will:

- Identify social policy impacting on clients
- Review and analyse social policy and seek to challenge social policy that impacts negatively on clients
- Develop social policy that is congruent with social work values
- Write and promote social policy consistent with social work values where possible and appropriate
- Respond to requests for information and comment on policy issues where appropriate and where the opportunity arises

• **ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS SKILLS**

The social worker will:

- Gather, analyse, evaluate and use information and knowledge during an assessment process
- Consider all life domains when conducting assessments including physical, social, psychological and environmental factors as well as legal, educational, health, employment and socio-economic systems
- Undertake balanced assessments of needs, strengths, opportunities, capacities and risks, where necessary, and respond appropriately
- Assist the client assess their own needs
- Recognise the signs of harm, abuse and neglect and responds appropriately
- Confidently make decisions and recommendations based on professional knowledge and judgement

• **RESEARCH SKILLS**

The social worker will:

- Apply research knowledge and undertake practice in an informed manner
- Develop, conduct and disseminate research to inform practice
- **ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS (record keeping, organisational policy and procedure)**

The social worker will:

- Record and store information in line with relevant legislation and/or agency policy and procedure. (In the absence of legislation – client files should be kept for a period of seven years following the last contact with the client).
- Write case records and report in a contemporaneous, objective and accurate manner
- Make records of all interactions with clients and relevant others
- Follow the policy and procedural requirements of agencies they are involved with
- Develop policies and procedures that reflect social work values and principles
- Analyse and identify when existing policies and procedures do not reflect social work principles and values and work to change them
GLOSSARY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

‘An Aboriginal person is often defined legally as a person who is a descendant of an Indigenous inhabitant of Australia, sees himself or herself as an Aboriginal person and is recognised as Aboriginal by members of the community in which her or she lives. Torres Strait Islanders have cultural origins in nearby Melanesia. Traditionally they lived in the Torres Strait, which separates the North of Queensland from New Guinea, though today many have migrated and now live on the mainland’ (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2008).

Advocacy

‘Advocacy is a term with roots in legal practice. It refers to the activities associated with negotiating or representing on behalf of a person’ (Burke & Dalrymple 2009, p. 265).

Anti-oppressive practice

‘A form of social work practice which addresses social divisions and structural inequalities ... to provide more appropriate and sensitive services by responding to people’s needs regardless of their social status. Anti-oppressive practice embodies a person centred philosophy, an egalitarian value system concerned with reducing the deleterious effects of structural inequalities upon people’s lives; a methodology focusing on both process and outcome; and a way of structuring relationships between individuals that aim to empower users by reducing the negative effects of hierarchy in ... the work they do together’ (Dominelli, cited in Dominelli 2009, p. 53).

Client

Clients are individuals, families and other kinship arrangements, groups, communities, organisations and societies, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged, alienated or have exceptional needs.

Culture

‘The distinctive ways of life and shared values, beliefs and meanings common to groups of people’ (Quinn 2009, p. 266).

Discrimination

‘Negative discrimination is the prejudging and unfavourable treatment of people on the basis of perceived difference. Positive discrimination refers to policies, programs or actions that favour disadvantaged persons or groups’ (Chenoweth & McAuliffe 2012, p. 310).

Ethical decision making

‘Ethical decision making is the process by which social workers engage in an exploration of values – that may be evident in the personal, professional, social and organisational spheres – in order to
establish where an ethical dilemma might lie according to what competing principles, and what factors take priority in weighing up the alternatives’ (McAuliffe 2010, p.41).

**Ethics**

‘Ethics is a branch of philosophy which addresses questions about morality, such as what is the fundamental nature of morality and the way in which moral values are determined’ (Gray & Webb 2010, p.1).

**Human Rights**

‘Human rights refer to the basic rights and freedoms to which all humans are entitled. They are socially sanctioned entitlements to the goods and services that are necessary to develop human potential and well-being’ (Ife 2010, p.148).

**Inclusion**

‘A social inclusion approach encompasses the facilitation of participation of individuals or social groups in the four key dimensions of social life: consumption, production, political engagement and social interaction’ (Lui, C., Warburton, J., Winterton, R. & Bartlett, H. 2011, p. 268 – 269).

**Informed Consent**

‘In general, for consent to be considered valid, six standards must be met: (1) coercion and undue influence must not have played a role in the client’s decision; (2) clients must be mentally capable of providing consent; (3) clients must consent to specific procedures or actions; (4) the consent forms and procedures must be valid; (5) clients must have the right to refuse or withdraw consent, and (6) clients’ decisions must be based on adequate information’ (Reamer 2006, pp. 167, 168).

**National Health and Medical Research Council**

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is Australia's peak body for supporting health and medical research; for developing health advice for the Australian community, health professionals and governments; and for providing advice on ethical behaviour in health care and in the conduct of health and medical research.

**Oppression**

‘Oppression designates the disadvantage, marginalisation and injustice some groups of people experience as part of their everyday life. It involves the devaluation of people’s attributes and contributions to society on the grounds of who they are as members of a group socially configured as inferior’(Dominelli 2010, p. 160).
Reflective Practice

‘Reflection is the process of learning from experience. It involves the process of questioning the foundation of one’s beliefs with a preparedness to change them in the light of that questioning’ (Fook 2013, pp. 3).

Reflexive Practice

‘Reflexivity is an acknowledgement of how our self plays a role in the knowledge that we recognise and develop: in short, how we see the world, others and our place in relation to it and them. Being reflexive involves the ability to factor this knowledge into how professional decisions are made and acted upon’ (Fook, 2013, pp 3).

Social Justice

‘Social justice refers to the concept of a society in which justice is achieved in every aspect of society, rather than merely through the administration of law. It is generally considered as a social world which affords individuals and groups fair treatment, equality and an impartial share of the benefits of membership of society’ (Ife 1010, p. 148).

Values

‘Professional values are a particular grouping and ordering of values within a professional context. In social work such values tend to focus on human functioning, capabilities and development’ (Congress 2010, p. 19).
REFERENCE LIST


Reamer, F. 2006 *Social work values and ethics*, 3rd edn, Columbia University Press, New York