



AASW

Australian Association
of Social Workers

Practice Standards

2013

Practice Standards

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Amendment April 2015 (page 4, section II.) to include the Global Definition of Social Work approved by the IFSW and IAASW in July 2014.

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I. Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

The AASW is committed to the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

- 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 this has for social work practice.
- Social workers acknowledge the strengths, capacities, abilities and contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to wider society.
- Social workers are responsible for ensuring that their practice is culturally responsive, safe and sensitive.

II. Definition of social work

The social work profession in Australia adheres to the following definition of social work jointly approved by the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) General Meeting and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) General Assembly in July 2014:

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people.¹ Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels² (July 2014).²

III. The Practice Standards in context

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) *Practice Standards* (the *Practice Standards*) has been developed to outline the practice expectations required of all social workers. They are designed to guide social workers' practice to ensure they fulfill the practice requirements as set out by the AASW. The AASW *Code of Ethics* (2010), (The *Code*) provides the foundation for the *Practice Standards*. The values and ethical responsibilities as detailed in the *Code* underpin all practice and therefore form the basis of the standards outlined in this document. The *Practice Standards* inform the *Australian Social Work Education and Accreditation Standards* (ASWEAS) which regulate and guide curriculum development for social work programs in Australia. Graduates from AASW accredited programs are eligible for membership of the AASW as per the AASW's Constitution and membership eligibility criteria. Extensive consultation was undertaken to develop these practice standards and they will be revised periodically to ensure they remain relevant to the changing social and political environment.

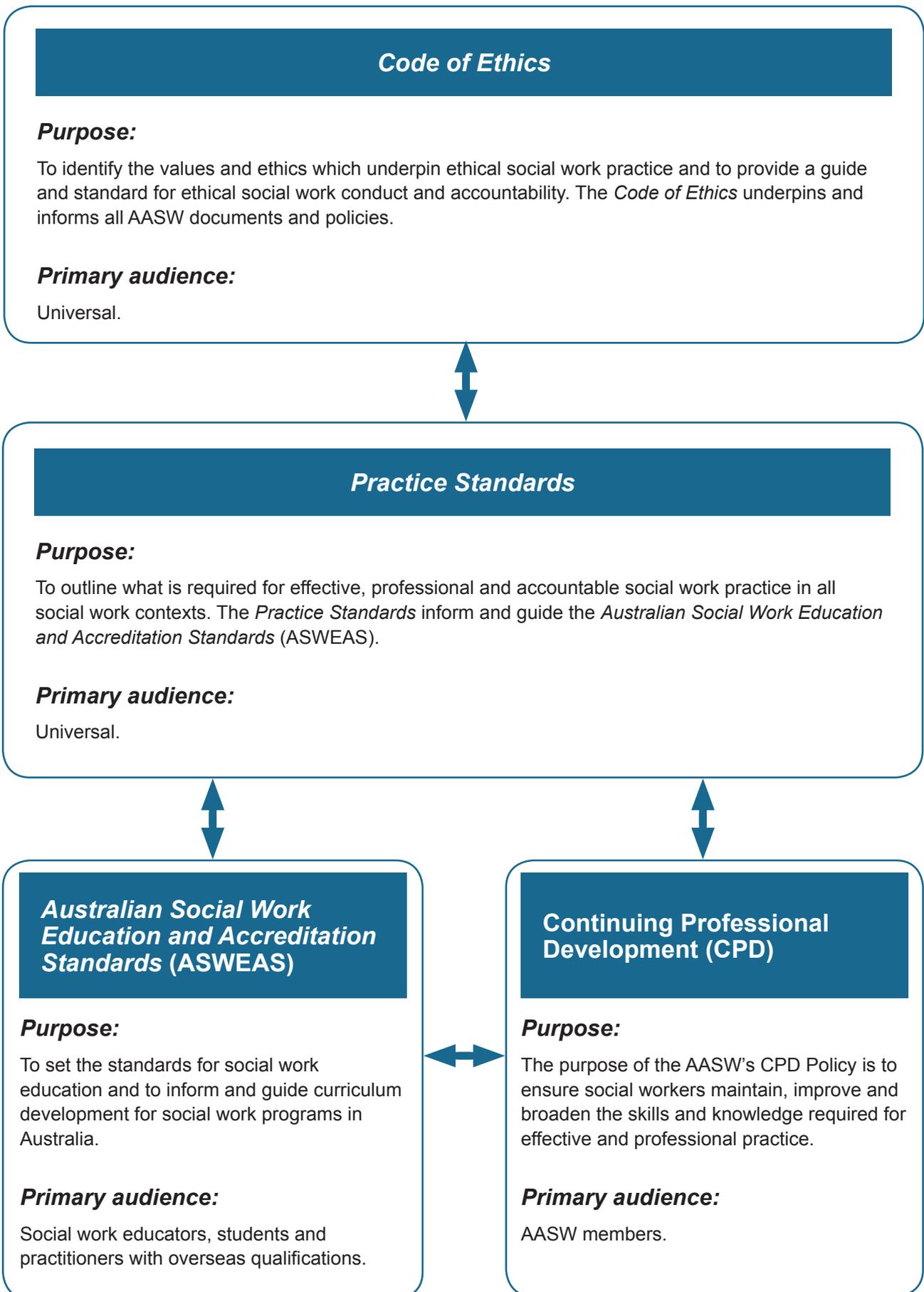
The flowchart below sets out the AASW's key practice documents and policies and how they relate to each other.

¹In maintaining consistency with the IFSW's definition, the *Practice Standards* has adopted the term 'people' for use throughout this document. The term 'people' is understood to mean 'individuals, families and other kinship arrangements, groups, communities, organisations and societies with whom social workers work'.

²International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) 2014, *Global Definition of Social Work*, ifsw.org/policies/definition-of-social-work/

Flowchart 1:

Relationship of AASW key practice documents and policies



IV. Aim of the *Practice Standards*

The aim of the *Practice Standards* is to provide:

- A guide to practice;
 - 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;
- A guide for planning ongoing professional development.

V. Framework of the *Practice Standards*

Values

Social work is committed to three core values which give rise to general and specific ethical responsibilities as outlined in the *Code of Ethics* (2010). These values and ethical responsibilities underpin and inform the practice standards outlined in this document.

The values are:

1. **Respect for persons**
2. **Social justice**
3. **Professional integrity**

Components of social work practice

The *Practice Standards* outline what is required for effective, professional and accountable social work practice. The practice standards in this document apply to all areas of practice listed below and they are categorised under eight components of practice common to all areas. Practice standards are specified for each of these components and each standard has detailed indicators which illustrate the requirements for meeting that standard.

The components of practice are:

1. **Values and ethics**
2. **Professionalism**
3. **Culturally responsive and inclusive practice**
4. **Knowledge for practice**
5. **Applying knowledge to practice**
6. **Communication and interpersonal skills**
7. **Information recording and sharing**
8. **Professional development and supervision**

Social work 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 practice³:

- **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**

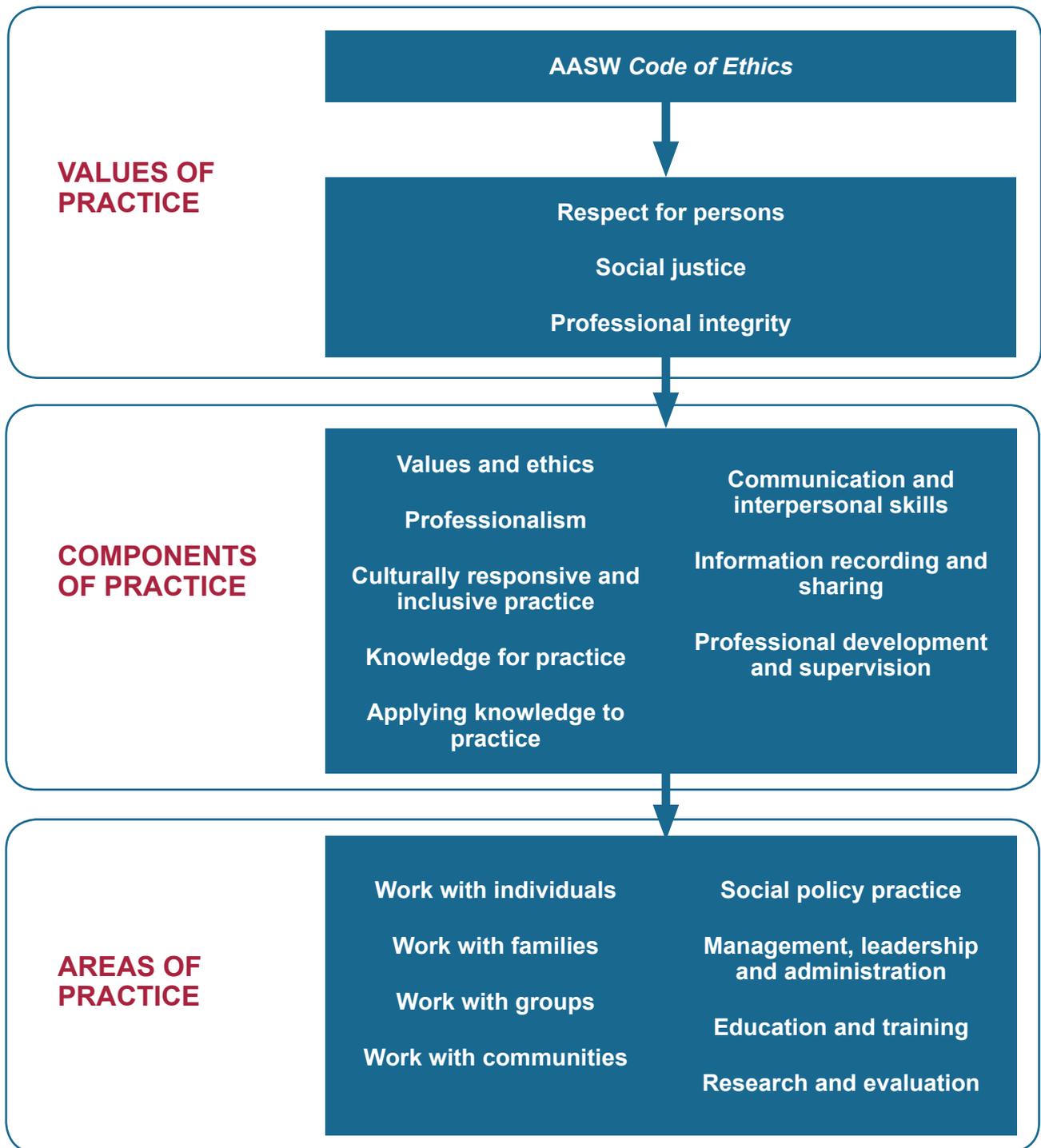
These areas of practice are not mutually exclusive and social workers frequently work across a number of these. For example, social workers might work with groups when they are community workers, educators, researchers, managers or family support workers. Further, all social workers should conduct evaluation and draw on research to inform practice. Across all practice areas, social workers work in partnership with people to facilitate empowerment, build on strengths, enhance wellbeing and social inclusion and promote community development. Social workers are required to meet all standards outlined in this document irrespective of the area or nature of their practice.

The below flowchart outlines the framework of the *Practice Standards* document:

³ Adapted from Chenoweth, L & McAuliffe, D 2012, *The road to social work & human service practice*, 3rd edn, Cengage Learning, South Melbourne.

Flowchart 2:

Social work practice



VI. The *Practice Standards*

1. *Values and ethics*

Social workers demonstrate that the values of social work are integral to their practice, they uphold their ethical responsibilities and they act appropriately when faced with ethical problems, issues and dilemmas.

STANDARD	INDICATORS
1.1 Practice in accordance with the <i>Code of Ethics</i> (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Practices within a social justice and human rights framework.b. Facilitates people's empowerment and works to eliminate all violations of human rights.c. Identifies social systems and structures that preserve inequalities and injustices and advocates for change.d. Challenges policies and practices that are oppressive and fail to meet international standards of human rights, social inclusion and social development.e. Upholds ethical responsibilities to relevant others, to the social work profession and in the workplace.
1.2 Manage ethical dilemmas and issues arising in practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Identifies and critically reflects on ethical dilemmas in accordance with the ethical responsibilities outlined in the <i>Code</i>.b. Raises the ethical issue/dilemma with relevant parties and attempts to seek a solution.c. Seeks supervision/consultation with manager/supervisor/relevant other when faced with an ethical dilemma.d. Reports to supervisor/manager or other appropriate person if they determine they are in a position which contravenes ethical principles outlined in the <i>Code</i>.e. Critically reflects on and examines personal and professional ethics and values that influence practice.⁴

⁴ Adapted from The College of Social Work (England) *Professional Capabilities Framework* 6 – full table qualifying to experienced level Social Worker (2012).

2. Professionalism

Social workers demonstrate active promotion and support of the social work profession, act with integrity and ensure accountability.

STANDARD	INDICATORS
2.1 Represent the social work profession with integrity and professionalism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Promotes the social work profession by contributing to social work activities and knowledge development through research, evaluation, education, consultation and presentation.b. Articulates the values, processes and outcomes of social work and how they apply to different practice contexts.c. Models and promotes social work values, responsibilities and objectives in professional practice and consistently acts in a principled and accountable manner.
2.2 Behave in a professional manner and be accountable for all actions and decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Acknowledges that social work positions carry power and uses authority responsibly to prioritise people's own expressed interests, as far as possible.b. Provides opportunities and encourages people to evaluate social work services and ensure people are aware of organisational and professional complaints mechanisms.c. Maintains appropriate professional/personal boundaries.d. Recognises and declares conflicts of interest when they arise.e. Maintains confidentiality and understands the legal limits to confidentiality.f. Recognises when personal factors or issues impact on professional practice and seeks support.g. Justifies all decisions, recommendations and actions and recognises limits to knowledge, skills and practice competence.⁵h. Seeks support and information or refers people when professional capabilities are exceeded.

⁵ Adapted from the Health and Care Professions Council *Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers in England* (2012).

3. Culturally responsive and inclusive practice

Social workers have adequate understanding and knowledge of cultural diversity in order to work in a culturally responsive and inclusive way.

STANDARD	INDICATORS
3.1 Work respectfully and inclusively with cultural difference and diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Demonstrates knowledge of diversity between and within different cultures including ethnicity, disability, economic status, age, sexuality, gender and transgender, faiths and beliefs.b. Proactively and respectfully promotes the rights of culturally diverse and minority groups in society.c. Demonstrates understanding of the complexity of cultural identities and how this impacts on practice.d. Creatively adapts and modifies practice in order to work effectively and inclusively with people who have different and diverse cultural identities, values, affiliations, beliefs and customs.⁶e. Engages in continuing professional development, supervision, cultural supervision and critical reflection; consults with relevant community members and professionals; and engages in collaborative learning and research to enhance knowledge and practice in working with culturally different and diverse groups.f. Critically reflects on own personal values, cultures and beliefs and how these impact on interactions with people, community members and colleagues; and on organisational policies and practices; and seeks supervision or consultation as appropriate.g. Recognises and appropriately challenges discriminatory and oppressive practice and policies with respect to culturally diverse people; at a local, national and global level, as appropriate and where possible.
3.2 Respect, strive to understand and promote the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Acknowledges, identifies and builds on the strengths, capacities and contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to society.b. Demonstrates awareness of the diversity among, and differences between, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures throughout Australia.c. Demonstrates knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, protocols and practices in a local context.d. Acknowledges and understands the historical and continuing disadvantage and oppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the impact this has on practice.e. Works collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in order to develop and provide culturally responsive practice.f. Engages in continuing professional development, consults with relevant community members and professionals and engages in collaborative learning and research to enhance knowledge and practice in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

⁶ Adapted from the Social Workers Registration Board (Republic of Ireland) Criteria and Standards of Proficiency for Social Work Education and Training Programmes (2011).

4. Knowledge for practice

Social workers have and obtain the knowledge required for effective practice.

STANDARD	INDICATORS
4.1 Understand higher level systemic influences on people with respect to area of practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Demonstrates understanding of social work practice within a global and environmental context.b. Critically analyses the structure of society with respect to power and disadvantage including the influence of gender, age, ability, sexuality, ethnicity and economic disadvantage.c. Demonstrates awareness of social, political, legal, cultural and organisational contexts and systems and how they impact on people.d. Demonstrates understanding and awareness of policy, including organisational policy, relevant to practice context and how this impacts on people.e. Demonstrates understanding and awareness of changes in society, demography and culture and how this impacts on the social work profession and people.⁷f. Demonstrates understanding of relevant legislation governing practice and the legal frameworks which inform and mandate practice.⁸g. Critically analyses policies, systems and structures that contravene social work values and do not prioritise the interests of people, groups, communities and wider society and works for change.h. Identifies policies that will promote and prioritise social work values and the interests of people and understands the mechanisms to influence policy change.
4.2 Understand and articulate social work and other relevant theories and concepts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Demonstrates a critical understanding of specific social work theories underpinning social work practice at all levels.b. Articulates and uses knowledge from other relevant subject areas such as law, sociology, anthropology, politics, economics, history, social theory, psychology, humanities and philosophy.c. Demonstrates understanding of theories of systems, human behaviour and development, personality development and life cycle stages.

⁷ Adapted from the Health and Care Professions Council *Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers in England* (2012).

⁸ Adapted from The College of Social Work (England) *Professional Capabilities Framework 6* - full table qualifying to experienced level Social Workers (2012).

4.3	Understand the role of research and evaluation in obtaining and generating new knowledge for practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Proactively seeks out new knowledge relevant to practice context. b. Proposes innovative research to develop new policies, practices and approaches for the social work profession. c. Has appropriate knowledge of research methodologies, the limits to these and how to implement findings in practice. d. Works collaboratively with fellow social workers and others from various different fields and organisations in conducting research and generating new knowledge. e. Distinguishes and evaluates various sources of knowledge including practice evidence; practice experience; personal and community knowledge and experience; research evidence; organisational and policy knowledge; and legal and ethical knowledge to help inform practice and decision making. f. Disseminates research knowledge as appropriate e.g. seminars, conferences, publications, peer/group supervision.
<hr/>		
4.4	Understand and articulate how and when theories, knowledge bases and knowledge sources inform practice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develops and articulates a practice framework that draws on contemporary theory, knowledge, methods and professional values. b. Appropriately and critically identifies and describes the model or approach used in practice and its theoretical and conceptual underpinnings. c. Identifies, describes, appraises and applies current research evidence, methodology and approaches to practice area. d. Understands the principles, framework and relevant legislation of the practice area, and selects practice approach accordingly.

5. Applying knowledge to practice

Social workers demonstrate the skills required to implement knowledge into practice.

STANDARD	INDICATORS
<p>5.1 Conduct an assessment and analysis of needs to inform the service being offered.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Undertakes an effective and holistic assessment by gathering relevant information appropriate to the person/organisation and practice context. b. Assesses nature and level of risk to people, if any, and incorporates into the overall assessment as appropriate. c. Analyses this information along with knowledge and theory in specific practice area to inform practice.
<p>5.2 Work collaboratively with relevant people.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Facilitates and enables people to make an assessment of their own needs where appropriate. b. Supports people to decide what service/s they want, to assist in meeting needs, taking into account any limitations to their capability, their voluntary/involuntary status and the choices available. c. Works with other agencies, teams and across jurisdictions both at a practice and policy level. d. When appropriate, develops a service plan that outlines what is being offered, objectives/goals and planned outcomes and evaluates and reviews the plan routinely.
<p>5.3 Use a range of specific social work methods and techniques appropriate to area of practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Selects an appropriate method of practice relevant to practice context to address and meet the needs, goals and preferences of individuals, families, groups and communities , taking into account best available research evidence for field of practice. b. Demonstrates competence and skill in the chosen method/s or technique/s. c. Challenges systemic and policy injustices and recommends/develops new policies using methods such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Social action ii. Advocacy iii. Research and evaluation d. Demonstrates skills, when undertaking research, in; literature review; proposal development; writing; undertaking ethics applications; data collection, analysis and dissemination; and evaluation.
<p>5.4 Apply critical and reflective thinking to practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Critically reflects on and evaluates practice with a particular focus on principles of self-determination, empowerment, inclusion, equality, human rights and social justice. b. Critically reflects on the role of social worker paying particular attention to power imbalances, professional boundaries, use of authority in statutory positions and work with people who are using services involuntarily. c. Critically reflects on and conducts evaluation of practice at an individual, program, organisational or policy level. d. Critically reflects on the broader organisational, societal and political context of practice.

6. Communication and interpersonal skills

Social workers demonstrate skills required to communicate and work effectively with others.

STANDARD	INDICATORS
6.1 Effectively communicate with a diverse range of people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Uses appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication with individuals, community members, colleagues and relevant others.b. Adapts communication form and style to effectively communicate with a diverse range of people.c. Uses conflict management, mediation and negotiation skills when appropriate to achieve the best outcomes.
6.2 Effectively communicate the details and nature of the service offered to people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Engages and includes people in decision making processes that affect them as far as possible including those using services involuntarily.⁹b. Informs people of policies and procedures of the service being offered.
6.3 Effectively work with others in a team environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Contributes discipline specific social work values, principles and practice to team activities.b. Relates to social work and other colleagues with respect, integrity and courtesy.c. Cooperates and collaborates with other disciplines when undertaking practice to improve service provision.d. Proactively and respectfully seeks to resolve conflict with colleagues.
6.4 Use information technology to communicate and provide services as appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Demonstrates skill in the use of information technology relevant to practice area.¹⁰b. Identifies the benefits of communicating and providing services in an online environment and in what circumstances it is appropriate to use such means.c. Identifies ethical considerations with respect to using online communication and social media for service provision including confidentiality, privacy and professional boundaries and addresses these appropriately.

⁹ Adapted from The Health and Care Professions Council *Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers in England* (2012).

¹⁰ Adapted from The Social Workers Registration Board (Republic of Ireland) *Criteria and Standards of Proficiency for Social Work Education and Training Programmes* (2011).

7. Information recording and sharing

Social workers are accountable and responsible for the information they collect and keep in the course of their work.

STANDARD	INDICATORS
7.1 Record and manage information appropriately.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Informs people of social work records and the purpose for which a record is made.b. Informs people of who will/may have access to their record and why.c. Advises people of how to access their records.d. Writes information in an accurate, objective and contemporaneous manner, acknowledging the basis of any subjective opinions.
7.2 Keep and maintain information in accordance with ethical principles and relevant legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Keeps information in accordance with ethical principles including confidentiality, informed consent and accountability.b. Stores records securely including electronic and paper records.c. Understands relevant legislation with respect to record keeping in area of practice.d. Stores adult records for seven years following last contact (in the absence of relevant legislation).e. Stores child records until the day the child would turn 25 years of age (in the absence of relevant legislation).

8. Professional development and supervision

Social workers demonstrate commitment to ongoing learning through continuing professional development and supervision.

STANDARD	INDICATORS
8.1 Actively participate in professional supervision.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Understands the role, purpose and function of supervision and the importance of seeking supervision from an appropriately trained and qualified supervisor.b. Ensures active engagement in appropriate supervisory processes, including cultural supervision where necessary.c. Actively seeks opportunities for feedback, mentoring, support and constructive criticism from senior social workers/colleagues in order to continuously improve practice.¹¹d. Demonstrates the ability to engage in critical reflective practice in supervision and in practice, including examination of personal and professional values that influence practice.
8.2 Engage in continuing professional development as outlined in the AASW continuing professional development requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Develops implements and regularly reviews a professional development plan.b. Identifies learning needs and seeks out opportunities to address these needs through training, consultation, supervision and support.c. Keeps abreast of new research, evidence and developments in specific field of practice and ensures knowledge and skills are up to date.d. Takes opportunities to work with researchers to generate new knowledge and evidence.
8.3 Contribute to education and professional development of others where appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Provides supervision to students, co-workers, and staff as appropriate and in line with ethical values and responsibilities as outlined in the <i>Code</i>.b. Ensures education and training are provided in a manner consistent with ethical values and responsibilities as outlined in the <i>Code</i>.c. Is appropriately experienced and qualified to provide supervision, education or training.d. Promotes and shares new social work research and knowledge.

¹¹ Adapted from The Social Workers Registration Board (Republic of Ireland) *Criteria and Standards of Proficiency for Social Work Education and Training Programmes* (2011).

VIII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the Australian Association of Social Workers, the Directors of the Board thank all involved in the 2011-2013 review of the AASW *Practice Standards*. The AASW warmly acknowledges the significant contributions to the development of the *Practice Standards 2013* by the following:

- Practice Standards Review Committee:
 - » Carmel Laragy, Convenor
 - » Karen Healy, AASW National President
 - » Brenda Clare, AASW National Director
 - » Helen Hickson
 - » Christine Levy
 - » Sharlene Nipperess
 - » Lynelle Osburn
 - » Virginia Scott
- Practice Standards Review Reference Group
 - » Robert Bland
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- Fran Hardcastle, AASW National Ethics and Practice Standards Officer
- Kym Daly, AASW Senior Manager Ethics & Standards

Finally, we would like to acknowledge and thank the social workers, other professionals, organisations and employers across the country, whose contributions have been invaluable to the development of these practice standards for social work in Australia.

