

# Code of Ethics

## 1. Preamble

This Code of Ethics is predicated upon the principles and aspirations of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.<sup>1</sup>

Members of the Society of Professional Social Workers (Inc.) ('the Society') agree, upon joining the Society, to support and abide by this Code of Ethics.

## 2. Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

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.

## 3. 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 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.

## 4. Nature of the Code of Ethics

This Code of Ethics (the Code) of the Society expresses the values and responsibilities which are integral to, and characterise, the social work profession. It is intended to assist all social workers, collectively and individually, to act in ethically accountable ways in the pursuit of the profession's aims.

Under the Constitution, the Society must maintain a Code of Ethics which contains a set of principles agreed to by all members. Upon becoming members and upon annual renewal of their membership, members of the Society make a commitment to, and are required to abide by this Code. Members of the Society, both practitioners and students, are called upon to account for their practice in the event of complaint or investigation regarding unethical conduct.

The Code remains open to revision as required and specified in the Constitution of the Society.

## 5. Social Justice

The social work profession holds that social justice is a core obligation which societies should be called upon to uphold. Societies should strive to afford protection and provide maximum benefit for all their members.

## **6. The Social Work Profession:**

- 6.1. promotes justice and social fairness, by acting to reduce barriers and to expand choice and potential for all persons, with special regard for those who are disadvantaged, vulnerable, oppressed or have exceptional needs.
- 6.2. advocates change to social systems and structures that preserve inequalities and injustice, opposes and works to eliminate all violations of human rights and affirms that civil and political rights must be accompanied by economic, social and cultural rights.
- 6.3. promotes the protection of the natural environment as inherent to social wellbeing, promotes community participation in societal processes and decisions and in the development and implementation of social policies and services.

## **7. Professional Integrity**

The social work profession values honesty, transparency, reliability, empathy, reflective self-awareness, discernment, competence and commitment.

## **8. Members of the Social Work Profession:**

- 8.1. apply knowledge and skills in ways that prioritise the needs of others over personal gain.
- 8.2. responsibly use power and authority in ways that serve humanity.
- 8.3. make considered and ethically accountable professional decisions.
- 8.4. maintain a high quality of professional conduct and behave with dignity and responsibility.
- 8.5. ensure ongoing professional competence by participating in and contributing to their own life-long learning, education, training and supervision, and that of other social work practitioners and students.

## **9. The Profession of Social Work**

### **9.1. Scope of the profession**

Professional social work practice embraces individuals, families, groups and communities and maintains high standards of professionalism. Social work practice also encompasses social policy and social administration, has a commitment to social justice and is underpinned by refereed research.

### **9.2. Continuing professional education**

Members are to maintain standards through participation in continuing professional education (CPE). The Society facilitates CPE activities and awards members who complete accredited CPE with the title of Fellow.

## **10. Conflicts of Interest**

- 10.1. Social Workers will fully and clearly appraise the client of the rights of all parties at commencement of the professional relationship.
- 10.2. Social workers will remain aware of the potential for conflicts of interest which may affect their ability to exercise professional discretion and unbiased judgment. These interests may derive from personal, emotional, conscientious, sexual, familial, social, cultural, religious, spiritual, financial, business, political, professional or organisational factors.
- 10.3. Social workers will be mindful that conflicts of interest can also arise in relation to involuntary clients, multiple clients and confidentiality issues.
- 10.4. At all times, the clients' interests remain a priority, with due consideration for the respective interests of others.

- 10.5. Where such a situation is foreseeable or occurs, social workers will declare their interest to the relevant parties and seek to negotiate a solution.
- 10.6. If already involved in a professional relationship when the conflict of interest arises, social workers will declare it and take appropriate action, such as consulting with a senior person and, where relevant, the client or clients. Members may also contact the Society's Ethics Consultation Service. This may result in renegotiating the professional relationship, or terminating it and referring appropriately.
- 10.7. Social workers will consider ethical issues surrounding the giving and accepting of gifts in a professional context. When deciding whether or not to give, accept and declare gifts, social workers will consider the professional relationship, any relevant organisational policies, the value of the gift, any cultural issues and the motivation for giving, receiving or declining the gift.
- 10.8. Social workers will not give or accept gifts which may impair professional judgement, effect the integrity or efficacy of the professional relationship or which are of substantial value.

## **11. Responsibilities of Professional Social Workers**

### **11.1. Confidentiality and privacy**

Professional social workers will respect the privacy and confidentiality of the client at all times. Signed consent to release of information, if required for client benefit, must be obtained from clients when there are no alternative statutory obligations.

### **11.2. The client**

Professional social workers must not use their professional relationship to obtain any personal advantage, other than a fee for service or salary.

### **11.3. Objectivity**

A professional social worker shall maintain practice objectivity at all times. Professional supervision, CPE and ongoing personal development are integral to best practice.

### **11.4. Professional collaboration**

A professional social worker must co-operate with and value the work of other professionals and agencies in the best interest of clients.

### **11.5. Clients of other social workers**

A professional social worker will not see the client of another social worker unless agreed by the client.

### **11.6. Empowerment of clients**

The role of the professional social worker is primarily to help clients become autonomous in decision making, leading to fulfilling and rewarding lives as part of families and communities. The needs of clients are paramount over the personal wants and beliefs of the social worker. Only with respect to the law or the lawful requirements of the employing agency can this be limited.

### **11.7. Provision of information**

A professional social worker will provide the client with all possible information relevant to their needs as required. This includes access to social work records concerning them wherever legally available.

## 11.8. Sharing of Information

There are exceptions to sharing a client's information, in situations where there is information to suggest that:

- a) A child or young person has been harmed or is at risk of harm i.e. child abuse or neglect.
- b) A person is likely to harm themselves such as there is reason to be concerned that a person may commit suicide.
- c) Another vulnerable person is at risk of harm such as situations of elder abuse, or domestic violence.
- d) A criminal act has occurred or is likely to occur.
- e) Where a statutory requirement to share information is a key aspect of service delivery.
- f) Where information is subpoenaed by the Court.
- g) Where the social worker needs to seek consultation, advice or direction from their supervisor.

In such circumstances, the client information pertaining to such matters will be shared with the appropriate agency/service provider and that this sharing may occur without seeking the client's permission or telling them in advance.

## 12. The Employing Agency

Professional social workers are required to abide by statutory requirements and the policy and procedures, standards and protocols of the employing agency. When these conflict with the values of the social work profession, they are obliged to strive to change them.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> *United Nations, General Assembly Resolution 217A (III), UN Doc A/810 at 71 (1948).* <<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/resolutions.html>>

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