

Community Work Australia Code of Ethics



Introduction

Community work is grounded in values of respect, inclusion, and social justice. Ethical conduct is therefore not optional but essential, as practitioners work closely with individuals, families, and communities experiencing vulnerability, disadvantage, or exclusion.

The Community Work Australia (CWA) Code of Ethics establishes the standard of professional conduct expected of all community work practitioners. It serves as both a guide to ethical decision-making and a benchmark for professional accountability.

A community work practitioner is a person who holds a relevant qualification and applies the values, knowledge, and skills of the profession to work independently or collaboratively in agencies, programs, or communities that promote participation, wellbeing, and social inclusion.

Practitioners are expected to recognise the inherent worth of every person and uphold their right to dignity, safety, and self-determination, irrespective of age, race, culture, religion, gender, sexual or gender diversity, or other personal or social characteristics. Conduct that violates these principles is considered incompatible with professional practice and unacceptable to Community Work Australia.

Compliance with this Code is a condition of professional recognition and membership of Community Work Australia.

Principles underpinning ethical practice

Respect for human rights and dignity: Every person has an inherent right to safety, respect, and the opportunity to reach their full potential, provided this does not infringe on the rights of others.

Commitment to social inclusion and justice: Social inclusion is a human right. An inclusive society promotes participation, equity, equality, and the removal of barriers that limit access to education, employment, and civic life.

Responsibility for equity and collective wellbeing: Every society has a duty to ensure fairness for all its members and to make additional provision for those who are excluded or disadvantaged.

Protection of human rights and freedoms: Every person is entitled to legal protection against discrimination based on age, disability, religion, race, sex, intersex status, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

Commitment to the common good: Community work practitioners contribute to the wellbeing of society through collective action, advocacy, and empowerment.

Recognition of First Nations peoples: Community Work Australia recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Peoples of Australia and supports their right to voice, self-determination, and sovereignty.

Environmental and digital responsibility: Ethical practice includes consideration of environmental sustainability and responsible use of digital tools, data, and technology in the service of community wellbeing.

1. Practice

1. Practitioners will maintain and extend their knowledge and skills through ongoing professional learning and reflective practice.
2. Practitioners will clearly communicate the nature and boundaries of their professional role and the expectations of the client relationship.
3. Client information shall remain confidential except where:
 - the client provides informed consent for information to be shared for referral or consultation purposes;
 - disclosure is required under the practitioner's terms of employment; or
 - there is a legal or ethical obligation to report risk of harm or comply with mandatory reporting requirements.
4. Practitioners will respect each client's right to self-determination and actively support their participation in decisions affecting their lives.
5. Practitioners will advocate for clients' best interests, particularly when clients are unable to represent themselves.
6. Practitioners are accountable for ensuring clients are:
 - fully informed of their rights and responsibilities;
 - able to make informed choices; and
 - able to access information held about them.
7. Practitioners will maintain appropriate professional boundaries and avoid dual or personal relationships that compromise professional judgment or integrity.
8. Practitioners will engage in supervision and reflective practice to maintain ethical awareness and address the emotional demands of their work.

2. The workplace

9. Practitioners will uphold the aims of their employing organisation while ensuring client rights are not compromised.
10. Practitioners will raise concerns where organisational policies or practices conflict with this Code or the ethical treatment of clients.
11. Practitioners will act responsibly in the use of public and organisational resources.
12. Practitioners will collaborate respectfully with colleagues, including volunteers, to share knowledge, skills, and experience.
13. Practitioners are encouraged to contribute to the education and supervision of students and early-career practitioners.
14. Practitioners who observe unethical behaviour will address it directly where safe to do so, or report it to a manager, supervisor, or appropriate authority.
15. Practitioners will respect the privacy, safety, and legal rights of colleagues in accordance with workplace health and safety and anti-discrimination laws.
16. Practitioners will take responsibility for their own wellbeing, seeking supervision and self-care strategies to sustain safe, effective practice.
17. Practitioners will ensure responsible use of digital systems and client information, protecting confidentiality and data integrity in all forms of communication.







3. Protecting the profession

18. Practitioners will engage in ongoing professional development to maintain contemporary standards of knowledge and practice.
19. Practitioners will act promptly and appropriately to report conduct by colleagues or organisations that breaches this Code or the law.
20. Practitioners will participate in complaint and disciplinary processes with honesty and professionalism.
21. Practitioners are encouraged to participate in research and consultation that advances evidence-based and ethical community work practice.
22. Practitioners will represent the profession accurately and responsibly in public and online communications.
23. Practitioners will uphold the rights, responsibilities, and legal protections of all people they work with, including clients, colleagues, and members of the public.

Conclusion

This Code reflects the ethical foundation of community work as a profession committed to human dignity, equity, and social inclusion. Community Work Australia expects all community work practitioners to embody these principles in their daily practice and professional relationships, contributing to a fairer, more inclusive, and more sustainable society.

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