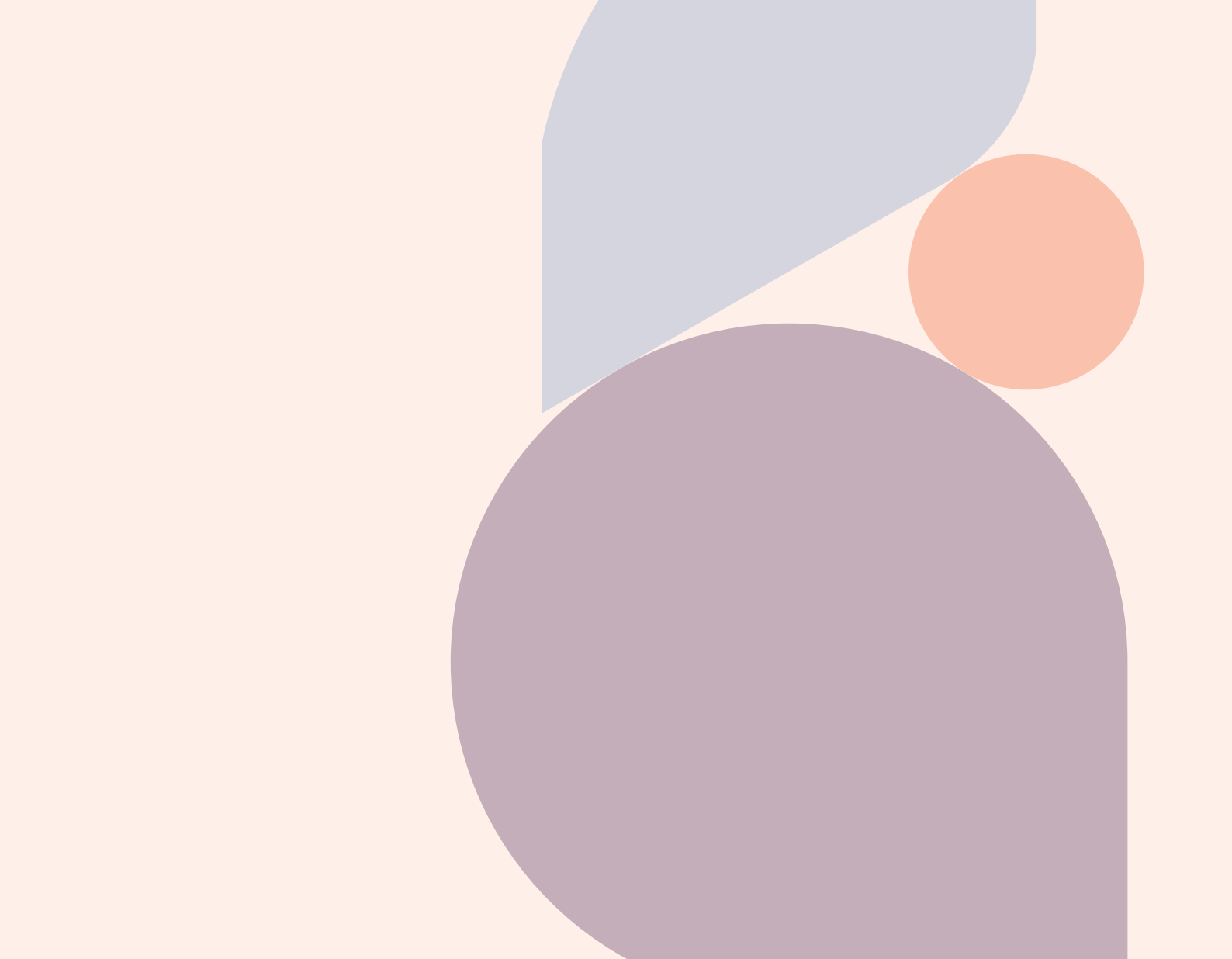


Community Work Australia ethics and good practice guide





This publication, which combines the code of ethics and practice guidelines, is supported by additional resources including self-assessment and supervisor-supported assessment tools which can be downloaded individually from www.communitywork.org.au. Further resources are available to members within the members' only area of the website.

Community Work Australia

Level 2, 190 Queen Street
Melbourne VIC 3000

Postal address: PO Box 42, Flinders Lane VIC 8009

☎ +61 3 9642 5166

✉ info@communitywork.org.au

🌐 communitywork.org.au

f @AuCommunityWork

in Community Work Australia

© Community Work Australia Limited 2025

This publication is copyright. Apart from fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission

Introduction

The *Community Work Australia Code of Ethics* and *Practice Guidelines* together define the professional and ethical standards that guide community work practice across Australia.

The **Code of Ethics** establishes the values, principles, and expected standards of conduct for all community work practitioners. It reflects the profession's commitment to social inclusion, equity, and respect for the inherent dignity and rights of all people.

The **Practice Guidelines** translate these ethical foundations into professional action. They describe what good practice looks like across diverse roles and settings, offering a framework for reflection, accountability, and continuous professional development.

Used together, the Code and the Guidelines form a coherent framework for ethical and competent community work practice. They support practitioners, employers, and educators to uphold consistent standards, safeguard clients and communities, and strengthen the integrity and recognition of the profession.

Code of ethics

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.

Practice Guidelines

In publishing Practice Guidelines, Community Work Australia is defining a standard of professional practice to which it holds its members accountable. These guidelines are, however, relevant to all community work practitioners, including those engaged in intake, support, case work, crisis intervention, team management, community development, and advocacy roles.

Developed in consultation with practitioners, industry partners, and education providers, the guidelines exemplify what is recognised as good practice within the Australian community work sector.

All community work practitioners, regardless of experience, or area of specialisation, are expected to demonstrate throughout their careers that they meet an ethical and professional standard of practice that protects clients, communities, and practitioners themselves.

These guidelines are underpinned by the Community Work Australia Code of Ethics, which provides the ethical framework within which exemplary community work practice occurs.

Values underpinning ethical practice

Like all professions, community work is guided by a **code of ethics** and a set of **core values** that shape the identity and integrity of practice.

For the community work practitioner, a commitment to social inclusion and social justice is fundamental. These values are complemented by respect for individual dignity, autonomy, and right to self-determination.

Community work practice is therefore grounded in principles that promote equity, participation, empowerment, and collective wellbeing, ensuring that professional action always upholds the rights and potential of all people.

How to use the guidelines

These guidelines, together with their associated indicators, provide a framework for professional community work practice. Originally conceived as practice standards, they expand upon the Community Work Australia Code of Ethics by articulating what constitutes quality and integrity in practice.

The guidelines serve both as a benchmark for experienced practitioners and as a guide for new community workers entering the profession. They do not replace the policies or procedures of employing organisations but rather establish a minimum acceptable professional standard that complements workplace requirements.

Practitioners are encouraged to use the guidelines as a reflective tool assessing their own practice against the indicators and identifying areas for ongoing professional development.

The guidelines

- Guideline 1 Ethical practice
- Guideline 2 Provision of service and supports
- Guideline 3 Confidentiality in the workplace
- Guideline 4 The regulatory framework
- Guideline 5 Diversity
- Guideline 6 The workplace
- Guideline 7 Professional development
- Guideline 8 Professional standing
- Guideline 1 *Ethical practice*



Guideline 1: Ethical practice

A community work practitioner, providing services to individuals and communities, should work in accordance with a code of ethics and in agreement with the principles of individual worth and the individual's right to social inclusion.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 1.1 Apply the principles of social justice, equity, individual worth, human dignity and self-determination in all day-to-day professional practice.
- 1.2 Practice ethical behaviour in every situation in accordance with the Community Work Australia Code of Ethics.
- 1.3 Seek advice, if required, when confronted with an ethical dilemma.
- 1.4 Challenge policies and practices that are unjust or fail to meet accepted community standards such as human and legal rights, social inclusion and self-determination.
- 1.5 Reflect on personal beliefs and values and identify those that might impact on the rights of others.
- 1.6 Base relationships with service users or groups on the principles of respect and human dignity regardless of a service user's own attitudes or behaviour.
- 1.7 Identify and appropriately address ethical issues, such as breaches of confidentiality, privacy, and professional boundaries that may occur when using online tools for service provision.
- 1.8 Use resources and public monies responsibly and for their specified purpose.
- 1.9 Use knowledge and skills for the benefit of the service user, the employing organisation and the common good.
- 1.10 Take steps to manage burnout, vicarious trauma, and psychosocial hazards in line with regulatory guidelines.
- 1.11 Work collaboratively with allied professionals and peer workers.

Guideline 2: Provision of services and supports

A community work practitioner should base their professional practice on the theory of community work and the principle that individuals, families, groups and communities have a fundamental human right to access appropriate services and support.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 2.1 Provide services that meet the needs of individuals and communities and facilitate their right to social inclusion or social justice.
- 2.2 Encourage service users to actively provide feedback on the effectiveness or otherwise of services.
- 2.3 Routinely advise service users of their right to complain and how to access the organisation's complaints policy.
- 2.4 Ensure that they do not discriminate against or in any way disadvantage a service user who has made a complaint.
- 2.5 Use appropriate research, planning and evaluation methodologies when providing community and human services.
- 2.6 Facilitate effective outcomes by routinely monitoring, evaluating and improving upon services, programs and projects.
- 2.7 Retain currency in theory and practice to underpin all service provision.
- 2.8 Advocate for service users and needed services.
- 2.9 Recognise the sometimes imbalance of power between themselves and service users and take care not to abuse that authority.
- 2.10 Adopt trauma-informed practice as a baseline expectation.
- 2.11 Provide services through digital channels where appropriate (e.g. telepractice, online counselling).

Guideline 3: Confidentiality in the workplace

A community work practitioner should understand and comply with all legislation and guidelines that provide for confidentiality and the privacy of service users, colleagues and employers.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 3.1 Be familiar with the relevant legislation and the organisational policies relating to confidentiality and privacy.
- 3.2 Inform service users as to who has access to their file and under what circumstances the information contained therein is or may be shared.
- 3.3 Provide service users with access to their own files and make them aware of the process to record or amend any representation, notation or omission with which they disagree.
- 3.4 Protect a service user's privacy through secure record keeping.
- 3.5 Seek informed consent for digital service delivery.
- 3.6 Seek informed consent from service users before any confidential information is shared, unless required by law.
- 3.7 Advocate for non-disclosure of confidential information where a practitioner believes that disclosure would adversely affect a service user.
- 3.8 Provide privacy to service users who wish to discuss sensitive matters.
- 3.9 Destroy obsolete confidential information or records in a secure manner.
- 3.10 Apply the principles of confidentiality to information that pertains to colleagues and employers.
- 3.11 Remind colleagues, who disclose confidential information, of their obligations under the various legislation and policy requirements that govern the workplace.
- 3.12 Manage digital records and privacy in line with the Privacy Act 1988, Australian Privacy Principles, and emerging digital standards.

Guideline 4: The regulatory framework

A community work practitioner often works within complex organisational structures governed by legislation or statute. The practitioner must, therefore, understand the sometimes seemingly contradictory frameworks that impact either on service provision or the service users with whom they work.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 4.1 Comply with legislation and statutory provisions, for example, mandatory reporting, which affect professional practice.
- 4.2 Alert their employer of relevant legislation not observed by the organisation.
- 4.3 Deal with service-user information in accordance with the principles and requirements of legislation including that which governs privacy, confidentiality and freedom of information.
- 4.4 Work within the legal limitations around the right to confidentiality.
- 4.5 Inform service users about the legal limitations of their right to confidentiality and privacy.
- 4.6 Ensure information systems relating to service users, resources, programs and projects are in place and kept in accordance with legislation and organisational policy and procedural requirements.
- 4.7 Ensure that the fundamental human rights of an individual are not impinged through the misuse of authority granted through law.
- 4.8 Understand which pieces of legislation govern organisational behaviours, for example, workplace health and safety, and inform the service user group wherever necessary.
- 4.9 Comply with Work Health and Safety Act obligations for employers and employees.
- 4.10 Where relevant understand and apply child safety standards and mandatory reporting obligations across jurisdictions.
- 4.11 Maintain awareness of data governance responsibilities (privacy, cybersecurity, reporting breaches).
- 4.12 Recognise the limits of practice scope and seek referral when cases require statutory or specialist authority.
- 4.13 Where relevant apply Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Standards.
- 4.14 Ensure accessible communication through Easy English, interpreters, and assistive technologies.

Guideline 5: Diversity

A community work practitioner works within diverse communities and should demonstrate in all their professional practice an understanding and sensitivity to diversity in all forms and compliance with all relevant legislation.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 5.1 Respond appropriately to diversity in all its forms.
- 5.2 Acknowledge and promote the rights of cultural and other diverse groups.
- 5.3 Challenge organisational behaviours and services that discriminate on the basis of individual or group characteristics including ability, age, beliefs, economic, employment and housing status, ethnicity, faith, gender and gender identity, and sexuality.
- 5.4 Recognise personal values and bias and take steps to safeguard against any adverse impact these might have on a service user's right to a service.
- 5.5 Recognise and declare conflicts of interest.
- 5.6 Gain information from relevant individuals and Indigenous and culturally diverse communities to ensure professional practice, policy, or service development is appropriate to community and service user needs.
- 5.7 Engage in individual and collaborative knowledge building to ensure professional practice with cultural or otherwise diverse or minority groups is appropriate and effective.
- 5.8 Adapt communication means and methods to effectively connect with a diverse range of people.
- 5.9 Use culturally appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication when engaging with individuals and community members.
- 5.10 Be aware and implement when required the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Standards.
- 5.11 Recognise intersectionality and how overlapping aspects of identity (e.g. culture, gender, disability, age, sexuality) may influence a service user's access to resources, risks of discrimination, or experiences of exclusion.
- 5.12 Adapt service delivery approaches so they are responsive to people experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage

- 5.13 Challenge organisational policies or practices that fail to address the combined impacts of race, gender, disability, sexuality, or other identities.
- 5.14 Collaborate with specialist or representative groups (e.g. disability advocacy bodies, multicultural services, LGBTIQ+ organisations) to ensure service users with intersecting identities are supported appropriately.
- 5.15 Apply reflective practice to examine personal assumptions and biases about intersecting identities and take corrective action where necessary.

Guideline 6: The workplace

Community work practitioners contribute to safe, respectful, and collaborative workplaces. This includes recognising and managing risks of burnout, vicarious trauma, and psychosocial hazards. Workers engage in team-based approaches, working effectively with allied professionals and peer workers.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 6.1 Understand and respect the nature and context of the workplace, which may also be the residence or home of service users.
- 6.2 Continually develop and use knowledge and skills within the workplace for the benefit of service users, colleagues and employers.
- 6.3 Maintain professional boundaries with service users and colleagues.
- 6.4 Acknowledge and protect confidential, sensitive or commercially valuable workplace information and intellectual property.
- 6.5 Treat colleagues with respect, honesty and consideration.
- 6.6 Recognise and act upon individual responsibility for workplace health and safety.
- 6.7 Understand and implement organisational policy and procedures.
- 6.8 Deal with conflict in a timely manner.
- 6.9 Report discriminatory, bullying or otherwise adverse behaviour by a colleague toward clients or another staff person.
- 6.10 Take up any areas of concern, either regarding policies, service provision or workplace behaviors with the appropriate supervisor, manager or employer.

Guideline 7: Professional development

The education of a community work practitioner does not cease upon graduation. It is incumbent on the community worker to undertake relevant professional development throughout their career to ensure their knowledge remains current and informs their everyday practice.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required

- 7.1 Identify skill and knowledge gaps and remedy through training, supervision or other means.
- 7.2 Seek appropriate professional support, supervision, mentoring or advice to address personal and professional limitations.
- 7.3 Critically analyse the profession, human service agencies and organisations, and social institutions in all aspects of the community work role.
- 7.4 Acknowledge personal responsibility and accountability for actions, decisions and professional development.
- 7.5 Increase new knowledge and information about the profession, the sector or areas of practice through active engagement with research and enquiry.
- 7.6 Keep abreast of current research, models of practice, and theory.
- 7.7 Supervise students, staff and volunteers in an ethical manner and from an appropriately qualified or informed knowledge base.
- 7.8 Share information and knowledge with colleagues.

Guideline 8: Professional standing

Community work practitioners not only represent the interests of service users and employers but are also representatives of the community work profession. Community work practitioners should therefore practice with integrity and not engage in any behaviour that brings the profession or other practitioners into disrepute.

Indicators

To comply with the intent of this guideline a community work practitioner will be required to:

- 8.1 Articulate the distinct role and values of community work within the broader human services sector.
- 8.2 Model professionalism in conduct, communication, and decision-making, representing the profession positively in public, community, and organisational contexts.
- 8.3 Engage with professional networks, associations, and communities of practice to support collective identity and credibility.
- 8.4 Promote the visibility and recognition of community work through advocacy, public engagement, or knowledge sharing.
- 8.5 Contribute to professional learning and development of others (e.g. mentoring, presenting, participating in research or policy dialogue).
- 8.6 Demonstrate pride and accountability in being a representative of the profession, balancing obligations to service users, employers, and the profession itself.