

# **Northwest Territories Standards of Practice For Social Workers**

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## Table of Contents

Foreword.....	3
Background.....	3
Statement of Social work Principles and Values.....	4
Standards of Practice	
Standard 1      The Professional Relationship.....	5
Standard 2      Professional Competence.....	6
Standard 3      Integrity of Professional Practice.....	7
Standard 4      Social Work Practice Methods.....	10
Standard 5      Social Work File Records.....	12
Standard 6      Confidentiality.....	15
Standard 7      Private Practice.....	17
Standard 8      Advocacy and Public Policy.....	18
Standard 9      Cultural Diversity.....	19
Standard 10     Rural and Northern Social work Practice.....	20

## **Foreword**

The Standards of Practice set out fundamental standards of professional practice and directives for social workers in the Northwest Territories. This is in accordance with the purpose and objectives of Bill 8, the Social Work Profession Act (NWT). The Standards endeavor to apply to a broad scope of social work practice and it is recognized that there are variations in practice methods and settings throughout the Northwest Territories. The Standards of Practice describe the basis on which sound and ethical practice is conducted.

For each of the Standards, a practice directive has been provided to guide social worker practice and conduct. Regardless of whether a social worker is a member of NWT, all northern social workers and social work students are encouraged to be familiar with the Standards of Practice as a significant reference for professional practice and conduct.

The Standards of Practice are intended to support and expand on the CASW Social Work Code of Ethics (2005) and the CASW Guidelines for Ethical Practice (2005). In addition to acting as a primary reference for the professional practice of individual social workers, the Standards are the reference for the evaluation of conduct of social workers by NWT when consultations or adjudications of complaints regarding professional practice are required.

## **Background**

Legislation provides the high-level structure for regulating social work, but it does not instruct social workers about the details of how they should practice. Standards of Practice outline the practice guidelines for social workers in a particular jurisdiction.

In 2010, the NWT Regulation Committee of the Association of Social Workers in Northern Canada (ASWNC) reviewed several of the provincial Standards of Practice and decided that Manitoba's Standards of Practice provided a place to begin for the NWT. We have permission to borrow from and adapt the Manitoba Standards for the Northwest Territories. The NWT gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the Manitoba Association of Social Workers and the Manitoba Institute of Registered Social Workers to the original version of this document.

## Statement of Social Work Principles and Values

The following statements are adopted from the International Federation of Social Workers Statement of Social Work Principles and Values, July 2000.

### **Definition of Social Work**

The social work profession promotes social change, problem-solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well being. Using theories of human behaviour and social systems, the practice of social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Social work recognizes the complexity of interactions between human beings and their environment, and the capacity of people both to be affected by and to alter the multiple influences upon them.

Definition of “Social Work” ( *Social Work Profession Act*)

- the assessment, remediation and prevention of social problems,
- the enhancement of the social functioning of individuals, families, groups and communities through direct counseling and the application of various practice methods and strategies.
- the development, promotion and delivery of human service programs,
- the development and promotion of social policies to improve social conditions and promote social equality, and
- such further functions or activities as may be designated as social work in the regulations.

### **Values**

The profession and practice of social work grew out of humanitarian and democratic ideals. Its values are based on respect for the equality, worth and dignity of all people. Social workers are committed to the values of acceptance, self-determination, respect of individuality and respect for cultural traditions, including the First Peoples of this land. Social work practice has focused on meeting human needs and developing human potential. Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action. The profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion. Social work values are embodied in the profession's national and international codes of ethics.

### **Practice**

Social work addresses the barriers, inequities and injustices that exist in society and the multiple and complex transactions between people and their environments. Its mission is to enable all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives and prevent dysfunction. Social work is focused on problem solving and change. It responds to crises and emergencies as well as to everyday personal and social problems. Interventions range from person-focused psycho-social processes to involvement in social policy, planning, program and community development, to social justice initiatives. Specific interventions might include counseling, clinical social work, group work, family treatment and therapy as well as efforts to help people obtain services and resources in the community.

# The Professional Relationship

## Standard 1

**The social worker actively utilizes core professional values for the engagement and formation of a therapeutic relationship with client systems.**

### **Interpretation**

The therapeutic relationship is a basic and essential component of professional social work practice. Together, clients and social workers address relevant social and personal problems of concern to the client. Social workers are involved with clients and client systems that include individuals, couples, families, groups, communities, organizations and various levels of government. The social work process is founded on, and is continuously guided by core social work values and principles as articulated in the following fundamental practice directives.

### **Practice Directives**

- 1.1 The best interest of the client will be the primary concern of the social worker in providing professional services.

Best interests of the client mean that the wishes, desires, motivations, and plans of the client are taken by the social worker as the primary consideration in any intervention plan developed by the social worker. All actions and interventions taken by the social worker are subject to the reasonable belief that the client will benefit from the action.

- 1.2 It is the fundamental belief of professional social work ideology that clients have the right and the capacity to determine and achieve their own goals and objectives.
- 1.3 Social workers must accept and abide by the CASW Code of Ethics as a guide for professional practice and will conduct themselves in accordance with the duties, obligations and responsibilities described therein.
- 1.4 Social workers will demonstrate language and behavior that convey a respectful and non-judgmental attitude towards clients.
- 1.5 The social work relationship is grounded on and draws on recognized theories of the social sciences as well as specialized knowledge in many different social work fields of practice.

# Professional Competence

## Standard 2

**Social workers will maintain competence in their knowledge and practice skills and adhere to the *Social Work Profession Act (NWT)* requirements regarding education, training and professional development.**

### **Interpretation**

Social workers are committed to continuous professional development and education as a means of maintaining competency in their practice.

### **Practice Directives**

- 2.1 Social workers are responsible for being aware of the extent and parameters of their competence and shall limit the scope of their practice accordingly. When a client's needs extend beyond the social worker's expertise, the worker will inform the client of the option to be referred to another practitioner. Another option would be for the social worker to work collaboratively with a professional who has the expertise needed to meet the client's needs. The decision to recommend specialized treatment services, referrals to other professionals, or to continue the professional relationship is to be guided by the best interest of the client principle.
- 2.2 Social workers are responsible for ensuring that their level of skill and knowledge is responsive to the changing demands of their practice and the changing situation of their clients.
- 2.3 Social workers will have current knowledge of policies, legislation, programs and issues related to the community, its institutions and services in their areas of practice.
- 2.4 Social workers will ensure that any professional recommendations or opinions that they provide in the course of their practice are appropriately substantiated by evidence and are supported by a credible body of social work knowledge.

# Integrity of Professional Practice

## Standard 3

**Social Workers will conduct professional practice with the understanding that there are limits and boundaries to the scope of their intervention and relationships with clients.**

### Interpretation

#### Relationship with Clients

Social workers are in a position of power and influence with respect to clients. The nature of the therapeutic relationship is based on trust. Considerable care must be taken to ensure that clients are protected from the misuse of power during and after the provision of professional services.

Social workers have the obligation to establish and maintain clear and appropriate boundaries in their professional relationships. Boundary violations are to be understood as any behaviour that infringes on trust through exploitation of the vulnerability of the client. This includes sexual involvement with the client, financial or other material gain, non-therapeutic influence and other misuse or abuse of the member's perceived authority and power.

#### Sexual Misconduct

Social workers will not cause harm to the client or to anyone within the client system through sexual behaviour or sexual interaction. Any and all sexual behaviour between the social worker and client, or between the social worker and any member of the client system, is unacceptable to the profession and to professional practice.

The influence of the therapeutic relationship between social worker and client is pervasive and may endure long after the professional relationship has terminated. Social workers are to be aware of the potential for conflict of interest, and harmful treatment that exploits clients within the therapeutic relationship. Behaviour of a sexual nature by a social worker towards a client represents a misuse of power and trust in the helping relationship.

#### Practice Directives

- 3.1 Social workers will declare and avoid conflicts of interest in forming relationships with clients or former clients, clients' family members, with students, employees and persons being supervised, that might present the risk of compromising the member's professional judgment or of increasing the risk of exploitation or harm to clients.
- 3.2 Social workers will not use information obtained in the course of a professional relationship to coerce, influence, harass, abuse or exploit either a client or former client.

- 3.3 Social workers will not misrepresent their professional qualifications, education, and experience or employment affiliation.
- 3.4 Social workers will not discriminate against any person regardless of ethnicity, language, religion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, gender orientation, age, physical appearance, physical or mental disability, economic status, political affiliation or national origin.
- 3.5 Social workers will act to enhance the capacity of clients to achieve self-realization by fostering and enhancing the client's capacity to make independent decisions.
- 3.6 Social workers will assist clients to access information services and resources and whenever possible, will promote and facilitate client participation in planning and decision-making.
- 3.7 If a personal or intimate relationship develops between a social worker and a former client, it is the social worker, and not the client, who assumes full responsibility for demonstrating to the professional association that the former client has not been directly or indirectly exploited, coerced or manipulated into forming or maintaining the relationship.
- 3.8 If there is a conflict between the standards of practice and a member's employing environment, the member's primary obligation is to the CASW Code of Ethics, the CASW Standards of Practice and the NWT Standards of Practice. In such instances, the social worker is expected to take reasonable measures to advise the employer of the conflict and of their professional obligation. Social workers are advised to seek clinical consultation and guidance should this situation arise.
- 3.9 When a formal complaint is filed against a social worker, the social worker will cooperate fully with all of the policies and procedures that comprise the complaints review process. Social workers will conduct themselves in a manner that demonstrates respect for both the complainant and the complaints officer.
- 3.10 Social workers are responsible for ensuring that sexual conduct with clients does not occur.
- 3.11 Social workers will not have sexual relations with clients or conduct themselves in any way that could be perceived as sexual coercion.
- 3.12 Social workers will not engage in the following actions with clients:
  - physical sexual relations (includes but are not limited to kissing of a sexual nature, touching of breasts or genitals, genital contact and sexual intercourse)
  - touching of a sexual nature (hugging, holding, patting, stroking, rubbing and any form of physical contact that is unnecessary to the therapeutic relationship)

- behaviour or remarks of an erotic or sexual intent (includes but is not limited to erotic, amorous, romantic, seductive, and overtly sexual behaviours. This may include expressing amorous or romantic feelings, requests to date, inappropriate gift giving, unnecessary off-site appointments, appointments beyond normal business hours, unnecessary comments about the client's body or dress, requesting unnecessary sexual history or preferences, wearing sexually suggestive clothing, displaying pornographic or other offensive material and jokes that are sexually provocative or demeaning.)
- 3.13 If a social worker develops a sexual attraction toward a client that compromise the integrity of the therapeutic relationship, the worker must seek consultation or supervision to develop an appropriate clinical management plan. In such cases, it may be appropriate for the worker to seek alternative services for the client and to terminate the relationship immediately, in keeping with the client's best interest.
- 3.14 If a client initiates behavior of a sexual nature, the social worker will advise the client that any sexual conduct within the relationship is not permissible. If sexually provocative behaviour by a client begins to interfere with the therapeutic process, the social worker will terminate the therapeutic relationship and offer to assist the client to seek alternate services.
- 3.15 Social workers will not provide services to individuals with whom they have had prior relationship of a sexual or romantic nature.
- 3.16 Social workers are strongly encouraged to ensure they do not render themselves vulnerable to misinterpretations of romantic intent or false accusations of sexual misconduct by a client. Social work practice must be conducted in a manner or in a setting that provides for adequate defense against such accusations.

# Social Work Practice Methods

## Standard 4

**Social workers will ensure that services are provided competently and responsibly in accordance with established professional standards and procedures.**

### Interpretation

Social workers are responsible to provide competent and responsible professional services in a manner that is consistent with accepted social work values, standards and methods.

### Practice Directives

- 4.1 Social work practice will be conducted in accordance with a professional process that includes phases of engagement, assessment, planning, intervention, evaluation and termination.
- 4.2 Social workers will provide clients with accurate and complete information regarding the extent, nature, and limitations of any services available to them.
- 4.3 Social workers will deliver client services and respond to client inquiries, concerns or complaints in a timely and responsive manner, as established by the standards set by the employing agency.
- 4.4 Social workers will provide an explanation and assist potential clients to access other services if workers are unable or unwilling to provide the requested professional help. Appropriate reasons for refusing service include but are not limited to:
  - a. complying with the potential client's request for service would require the member to violate ethical and legal requirements including, but not limited to the CASW Code of Ethics, the NWT Standards of Practice, the Criminal Code of Canada; and the NWT Human Rights Act;
  - b. complying with the potential client's request would violate the social worker's values, beliefs and traditions to the extent that the member would not be able to provide competent or ethical professional services; or the client requirement for service is determined not to be within the knowledge and skill competencies of the social worker;
  - c. the worker is aware of extenuating circumstances such as a planned absence from practice, health problems, or pending relocation of practice that would make compliance with the potential client's request for service impossible and not in the potential client's best interests;
  - d. the potential client is unable or unwilling to reimburse the worker or the worker's employer for services rendered, wherever such reimbursement is both appropriate and required as a condition of providing service;

- e. the potential client has repeatedly, and without adequate explanation, cancelled or changed the interview or meeting time to the extent that the social worker believes that financial hardship or compromised service provision will result; and
  - f. the potential client behaves in a threatening or abusive manner such that the worker believes that their safety or anyone with whom the worker has a personal or professional relationship would be in jeopardy.
- 4.5 Social workers will inform clients of foreseeable risks/limitations in seeking professional social work services, in accordance with the professional obligations of social work as outlined in the Code of Ethics.
- 4.6 Social workers may provide services and products at fair market value so long as the provision of these services and products has been offered with fair choice and are relevant and serve professional standards.
- 4.7 Social workers will terminate professional services to clients when such services are no longer required or requested by the client.
- 4.8 Social workers may provide appropriate services *pro bono* providing the NWT Standards of Practice are upheld and the services do not constitute a conflict of interest.
- 4.9 Social workers will not engage in the provision of professional social work services when their competency is compromised or impaired by use of alcohol, illicit drugs, prescription medication, illness, personal problems or other reason.
- 4.10 Social workers may act as an advocate and broker or mediator on behalf of clients and in doing so, they will inform clients of any action taken and its anticipated consequence and outcome. Social workers will adhere to the specified principles and standards concerning confidentiality when conducting advocacy and brokerage services.

## The Social Work File Records

### Standard 5

**The creation and/or maintenance of file records by professional social workers are essential components of professional practice. It is the responsibility of the social worker to ensure that client records are kept in accordance with the following standards, with formal documented policies of the employing agency, and according to all applicable legislation.**

#### **Interpretation**

The process for the preparation and organization of material for the file record provides a means for describing the client's unique situation and circumstances and for planning the ongoing social work interventions. The purpose of the social work record is to document the continuity of service, establish a means of accountability, and provide evidence of the services provided. Records are also used to evaluate services, and provide data and information for approved research and education. Social workers ensure that records are current, accurate, contain relevant information about clients, and are managed in a manner that protects client privacy.

#### **Practice Directives**

##### **Record Content and Format**

- 5.1 Social workers keep accurate, continuous, dated, legible and signed records for each client or client system served.
- 5.2 Social work records may include any or all of the following: narrative reports, assessment reports, progress notes, checklists, correspondence, journals or appointment records, film, audio, video or other electronic recordings, tools or instruments used by the social worker in providing professional services.
- 5.3 The social worker must sign the record for each entry with full name, highest degree and professional registration.
- 5.4 An accurate record will document the client circumstances accurately and contain only information that is relevant and useful to the understanding of the situation and the provision of services and report impartially and objectively the factors relevant to the client's situation. The record should clearly distinguish the social worker's observations and opinions from the information reported by the client; be easily understood and avoid ambiguous, unclear or obscure language and symbols. The record should indicate corrected text through use of appropriate flagging and signatures. The record must identify sources of information.
- 5.5 The social work record should be minimally a document of clinical impressions, goals and objectives, a working hypothesis, a service plan, intervention and education.

- 5.6 Social workers document their own client services. Social workers do not sign records or reports authored by any other person. Social workers may co-sign a document if they are in a collaborative or supervisory role with another social worker.
- 5.7 File information is recorded after the service is provided, or as soon thereafter as is reasonably possible.
- 5.8 Social workers will preserve the integrity of client records. If a client disagrees with the accuracy of a record and wishes the record altered, the worker shall adhere to the policies and procedures of the employing organization.

### **Record Maintenance**

- 5.9 Social workers employed by an organization acquire and maintain a thorough understanding of the organization's policies and procedures with regard to the retention, storage, preservation and security of all records (hard and electronic). Self-employed social workers must establish clear policies and practices relating to record retention, storage, preservation and security.

### **Access and Disclosure**

- 5.10 Social workers employed by an organization acquire and maintain an understanding of policies regarding access to confidential client information. Such policies pertain to access requests by clients and any other parties. Self-employed workers must establish clear policies and practices regarding access to and disclosure of confidential client information that are consistent with these standards of professional practice and pertinent legislation.
- 5.11 Social workers fully inform clients, upon request, of their policies regarding access to information. Social workers are encouraged to inform clients early in the service relationship of limits to record confidentiality as well as access entitlement and procedures.
- 5.12 When authorized in writing by clients, their guardians or legal representatives, Social Workers release information from the record to third parties within a reasonable time. The authorization must specify the information that is to be released. This may include a specified portion of the record, the entire record, or a summary of the worker's contact with the client, the party or parties to whom the information is to be released, the purpose and intended use of the released information, and a specified duration for the validity and expiration of the authorization.
- 5.13 Social workers may release information from the record to third parties without the client's authorization only if disclosure is legally obligated, or if the worker has evidence to conclude that such disclosure is urgent and essential to the prevention of harm and injury to the client or others. Social workers may decide not to release information to a third party if, in the member's professional judgment, such a release could result in harm to the client.

- 5.14 Prior to releasing information from a file record that pertains to others in addition to the client, informed authorization for release of information must be received from each mentioned third party.
- 5.15 Social workers who are served with a formal notice or subpoena to produce client records before a court and who are of the opinion that disclosure would be detrimental to the client, should themselves, or through legal counsel, advocate for restricted or non-disclosure to the court.
- 5.16 Social workers may permit client records to be used in a non-identifying manner for the purpose of research, teaching, or general evaluation of service delivery. If the removal of identifying information does not sufficiently ensure the client's anonymity, the worker does not permit access to the record for these purposes. When the client record is authorized by the employing agency for use in research, education or evaluation, the social worker will ensure that the intended use has been subjected to proper authorization procedures, ethics reviews and ensure a means of accountability to the agency or social worker is established.
- 5.17 Social workers who intend to terminate independent practice in the Northwest Territories will notify the professional association of their future location and of the future location of the client records. This notification will enable the professional association to provide information to any clients who may want to locate and access their client record.

## Confidentiality

### Standard 6

**Social workers will safeguard the confidential nature of the professional relationship with clients and of the information obtained within that relationship.**

#### **Interpretation**

The professional relationships developed and maintained between a social worker and client are predicated on both the core values of social work and on the client's belief and expectation that information that they disclose about themselves or others will be held in confidence. The concept of confidentiality is the cornerstone of the therapeutic relationship. Any and all exceptions to confidentiality must be clarified at the outset of the social worker and client relationship. Disclosure of any information pertaining to the client, whether acquired by the client or by others about the client, is only permitted when social workers are legally or ethically bound to disclose such information. Client information is then released in accordance with standard guidelines for client consent to disclosure.

In addition to safeguarding client information, social workers are obligated to apply good judgment in relation to their place of employment and the practice of their colleagues. Information that is disclosed regarding agency operations and colleagues should be discussed for professional purposes and conducted in a secure setting.

#### **Practice Directives**

- 6.1 Social workers will inform clients early in their relationship of the parameters of the protection of client confidentiality within the social worker's practice setting. Employer policies and practices may necessitate sharing client information for clinical supervision of the social worker, alternate social work coverage of client assignments for social worker absences, performance appraisals, service reviews and approved research.
- 6.2 Social workers will obtain consent to release and receive information to or from a third party from the client or an authorized representative. The consent will specify the information to be released. In priority situations, verbal consent by the client may constitute proper authorization. Any terms of a verbal consent should be documented clearly in the client record. Circumstances requiring consent may include, but are not limited to:
  - a. referral, consultation and collaboration with other service providers related to the provision or service to the client;
  - b. photography, electronic recording, or permitting third party observation of client for educational or publicity purposes;
  - c. case presentations for education, research or publication.
- 6.3 Disclosure not authorized by the client is justified under certain circumstances. Circumstances requiring unauthorized disclosure may include, but are not limited to:
  - a. requirements in accordance with legislation (child welfare, criminal code, protection for persons in care);

- b. legal obligation (court order);
  - c. when disclosure is essential to the prevention of harm to the client or to others.
- 6.4 Social workers may disclose pertinent confidential client information when required to respond to a formal allegation of misconduct, incompetence or incapacity. Social workers will not disclose more information than is required for their defense.
- 6.5 Social workers using collection agencies or legal proceedings to collect unpaid fees may release only the client's name, the contract for service, statements of accounts and any records related to billing. This disclosure would not extend to the content of the services provided.
- 6.6 Social Workers in community practice (community groups, agencies and other organizations) will keep confidential any information about the personal lives, personalities, and personal behaviour of the individuals involved. The social worker will also keep other information confidential about such clients, including human resources, finances, management practices, strategic and political information.

## Private Practice

### Standard 7

**Social workers in private practice are responsible to uphold the NWT Standards of Practice, and CASW Code of Ethics.**

#### **Interpretation**

Private practitioners are social workers who, wholly, or as a form of secondary employment have the responsibility for their own practice. They have the responsibility to set up conditions of exchange with their clients, and identify themselves as social work practitioners in offering service.

#### **Practice Directives**

There are practice directives specific to social workers in private practice.

- 7.1 Social workers in private practice will maintain their accessibility to clients.
  - a. To respond to unanticipated needs by, for example, having messages answered and relayed promptly and accurately;
  - b. Arrange for coverage by competent peers when not available to clients (vacation, illness);
  - c. If accommodations are required and noted in advance, the social worker will make every attempt to access the appropriate helping devices. If not available, all efforts would be made to refer the client to a competent peer who can provide the needed accommodation..
- 7.2 Social workers in private practice will maintain access to professional case consultation.
- 7.3 The social worker in private practice keeps records that substantiate service in a secure place, and in accordance with all applicable legislation.
- 7.4 The social worker will ensure malpractice insurance is maintained.
- 7.5 Social workers will establish a fee structure when in independent practice or use the fee structure of the agency in which they are working.
  - a. All fees will be discussed with clients at the beginning of social work service
  - b. The following must also be discussed: third party payments, charges for missed or cancelled appointments, overdue accounts and non-payment of accounts.
- 7.6 The social worker is at liberty to provide services on a pro bono basis but must establish a process and validation for this.
- 7.7 Social workers that work for an agency or the government, are not to solicit employer's clients for their private practice.

## Advocacy and Public Policy

### Standard 8

**Social workers will use their specialized training, professional values and experience to advocate for and to promote social justice and public policy that will serve to enhance human well-being.**

#### **Interpretation**

By virtue of their chosen profession, social workers have concern for the social, political and environmental conditions that contribute to inequality and deprivation. As described in the CASW Code of Ethics, social workers are ethically compelled to promote and protect human rights and equality of treatment and circumstances through activities of advocacy.

Social workers must become knowledgeable and aware of oppressive policies and practices relating to ethnicity, gender bias, gender orientation, sexual orientation, age, race, ability and/or religious and political affiliation. They are also encouraged to be knowledgeable of other conditions that might contribute to social injustice, deny fundamental human rights, and produce discrimination and imbalances of power that adversely effect clients and contravene the values of the profession of social work.

#### **Practice Directives**

- 8.1 Social workers will promote adherence to standards of practice within the profession of social work and will act to enhance the quality of service provision through their own professional practice and conduct.
- 8.2 Social workers will advocate for the improvement of social, economic and political conditions in order to promote the rights and interests of clients, as well as for the overall benefit and well being of society.
- 8.3 The social worker will always demonstrate respect and courtesy for the social work profession and social work professionals in the way they carry out their professional obligations and practice.
- 8.4 When the social worker is acting within a professional role, the social worker will adhere to the values and standards described in the CASW Code of Ethics and the Northwest Territories Standards of Practice for Social Workers.

# Cultural Diversity

## Standard 9

**Social workers recognize that many different cultural and ethnic groups populate the Northwest Territories. Social workers will conduct their professional activities with sensitivity and respect for their client's unique cultural and ethnic context. In the NWT, this includes sensitivity to multi-cultural populations and indigenous populations.**

### **Interpretation**

As a profession, social work acknowledges that the term cultural implies integrated patterns of human behaviour including thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and those institutions of racial, ethnic, religious or social origin.

Social work philosophy and practice promotes the development of a just and equitable society. In view of this goal, social workers must be dedicated to beliefs, practices and methods that respect and promote a human rights perspective and must challenge any form of discriminatory and oppressive practice.

### **Practice Directives**

- 9.1 Social workers will conduct their practice with sensitivity and understanding, which implies the recognition of the client's cultural and ethnic context.
- 9.2 Social workers should use a collaborative approach, when appropriate, to assist the client to access culturally appropriate services and resources.
- 9.3 Social workers must continuously engage in reflection and self-assessment in order to critically examine how their own beliefs and practices may impact the development of helping relationships with people of cultural and ethnic diversity.
- 9.4 Social workers must be concerned with identifying and addressing issues of power imbalance as they occur within the social, economic, political, cultural and ethnic contexts of the client's environment, respecting principles of individual human rights and freedoms.
- 9.5 Social workers have the responsibility to assist the client in identifying and assessing the significance of any cultural and ethnic factors that may need to be considered in the development of an intervention plan.
- 9.6 Social workers are responsible to develop their knowledge and understanding of cultural and ethnic diversity and issues related to cultural and ethnic diversity. This may be done through independent research, participation in professionally appropriate cultural and ethnic activities, courses and workshops, and through collaboration and consultation with persons and/or groups who are knowledgeable in this area.

## Rural and Northern Social Work Practice

### Standard 10

**Social workers who practice in rural and northern locations of the Northwest Territories are responsible for upholding the NWT Standards of Practice and the CASW Code of Ethics. The social workers that practice in remote and rural areas of the Northwest Territories must become familiar with working in a variety of roles and with various disciplines for the benefit of clients. Much of social work's knowledge, skills and value base is generic and this eclectic, holistic perspective is especially suited to social work practice with individuals and families within rural and northern communities.**

#### **Interpretation**

Social workers practicing in rural and northern communities must develop skills associated with a variety of diverse roles to be able to work collaboratively with others in the community.

It must be acknowledged that social workers who practice in a rural and northern community have the advantage of greater flexibility, independent decision-making and inclusion in community culture and activities; they may also face unique challenges:

- Lack of local resources
- Lack of supervision
- Geographic isolation
- Community knowledge of private life
- Dual relationships
- Maintenance of confidentiality in small communities
- Lack of professional peer support
- Lack of opportunities for professional development

#### **Practice Directives**

10.1 Social workers are encouraged to develop and maintain collegial relationships for the purpose of professional support. In the absence of social work peers, the social worker is encouraged to develop a collaborative relationship with other helping professionals for the purpose of support and review of practice.

10.2 Social workers who are in an isolated practice setting are encouraged to use alternate methods for developing and maintaining affiliation with the social work collegial community such as using print, electronic media, and electronic networking.

10.3 Social workers are encouraged to engage in collective problem-solving with other helping professionals and members of the community to collaboratively address issues such as scarcity of resources and other issues of concern.

10.4 Social workers are required to engage in professional development and educational activities that enhance knowledge and skill. Sharing professional expertise through collaboration and collective educational opportunities may be a way for social workers to meet this professional obligation in an isolated practice setting. The knowledge, skills and competencies of other disciplines

may serve to further inform social work practice in areas such as communication, leadership, team building, consensus building, problem solving, research and community development.

10.5 Social workers in small, isolated communities are frequently required to navigate dual relationships. Where a social worker has a connection to a client system (through family, community role, or service delivery) the social worker is expected to maintain professional boundaries for the purposes of delivering services.

10.6 Social workers are encouraged to develop and maintain an active relationship with the Association of Social Workers in Northern Canada (ASWNC) and to use this organization for the purposes of professional development, promoting the social work profession, and collegial support.