

# Standards of Practice



## STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

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## Introduction

The following Standards of Practice provide minimum standards which all social workers practicing in Alberta are expected to meet. These standards form part of the regulatory framework for the profession and are developed and revised in accordance with section 133 of the *Health Professions Act*. This version of the Standards of Practice was adopted by the Alberta College of Social Workers Council on October 25, 2013 and replaces the previous Standards of Practice dated December 2007.

### A. DEFINITIONS

In these Standards,

- (a) **CLIENT** refers to a recipient of professional services, irrespective of whether fees are charged or the salary or compensation received by the social worker, and includes
- i. an adult or minor age 14 or over who has the requisite understanding to appreciate the nature and consequences of the professional services being provided;
  - ii. the guardian in respect of a child under the age of 14 or an individual for whom a guardian has been appointed, unless otherwise provided in this Regulation;
  - iii. the corporate entity or organization in cases when professional services are provided to benefit a corporate entity or organization rather than an individual, or
  - iv. the couple, family or other group in cases when professional services are provided to benefit a couple, family or other group rather than an individual;
  - v. notwithstanding 1(b)(i) and (ii), any person shall be the client for issues directly affecting the physical or emotional well-being of the individual, such as sexual or other exploitive relationships, and/or issues specifically reserved to the individual, and agreed to by the guardian prior to rendering services;
  - vi. notwithstanding above sections, “client” may be defined differently in certain legislation.

- (b) **COLLEAGUE** refers to any other social worker, any person employed in the same organization as the social worker, or any other professional the social worker has contact with in the provision of professional services.
- (c) **COLLEGE** refers to the Alberta College of Social Workers.
- (d) **CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION** refers to information obtained by a social worker in the context of a professional relationship or in other circumstances when there was a reasonable expectation that a social worker would not disclose that information.
- (e) **CONFLICT OF INTEREST** refers to a situation where a social worker's affiliation with an organization, group, individual or client is or may appear to be compromised due to another affiliation. Conflicts may arise when or if a social worker has a relationship or interest that could be seen as improperly influencing their professional judgment or ability to act in the client's best interest. A conflict of interest may exist whether or not the social worker benefits from the situation if it raises significant concern about the social worker's objectivity.
- (f) **CONSULTATION** refers to a problem solving process in which expertise is offered to an individual, group, organization or community.
- (g) **DUAL/MULTIPLE ROLE RELATIONSHIP** refers to a professional relationship when there is a present or previous familial, social, sexual, emotional, financial, supervisory, teacher/ student, administrative or legal relationship.
- (h) **INFORMED CONSENT** refers to permission given by a client to a social worker, based on reasonable disclosure by the social worker and understanding by the client ,of the facts, risks and alternatives, to use identified intervention procedures, which may include assessment, treatment, follow-up, research or community intervention, or to disclose confidential client information.
  - i. "Best practice" wherever reasonably possible and appropriate is to have written consent.
  - ii. Verbal informed consent may be obtained and noted where written consent is not reasonably possible or appropriate.
  - iii. Consent is considered to be implied under the following circumstances: returning voluntarily for ongoing services; attending a drop-in service or program; accessing crisis, emergency, information or referral services.

- (i) **INVOLUNTARY CLIENT** means a client who receives services because of a legal mandate such as probation or child welfare or one who is forced or pressured to seek services by family members, employers, or others in a position of power or influence over the individual.
- (j) **MUTUAL/MUTUALITY** means that the helping process, when feasible and subject to relevant legislation and regulation, will involve shared control between the client and the social worker toward the achievement of agreed to or acknowledged goals.
- (k) **ORGANIZATION** refers to any setting as well as to the administrative structures through which professional services are provided, including for-profit and not-for-profit community agencies, private practice settings, government agencies, health services, schools, and other entities.
- (l) **PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP** refers to a relationship with a social worker, when the social worker is assumed to have expertise, knowledge or skills by virtue of the social worker's qualifications as a social worker, whether or not there is an exchange of money or other remuneration.
- (m) **PROFESSIONAL SERVICES** refers to a service that comes within the practice of the profession as defined in Schedule 27 of the *Health Professions Act* and includes all of the actions of a social worker in the context of a professional relationship including but not limited to administration, education, clinical services, research, training, community intervention, policy analysis and advocacy.
- (n) **REASONABLE** refers to the principle of common law suggesting that which a "typical" or "average" social worker, with similar training and experience, would consider to be appropriate in given circumstances.
- (o) **RECORD** refers to a document, whether written, electronic or in any other form, containing information about a client, the client's circumstances and environment, the professional services provided to the client and the outcome of the provision of those services.
- (p) **SOCIAL WORKER** refers to a person regulated under the Social Workers Profession Regulation in the Province of Alberta.
- (q) **SUPERVISION** refers to the professional relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee that includes evaluation and direction over the services provided and promotes continued development of the supervisee's knowledge, skills and abilities to provide services in an ethical and competent manner. Where supervision is limited to overseeing organizational requirements and compliance with policies it does not fulfill the requirements for supervision under these Standards of Practice.

- (r) **TELEPHONIC OR OTHER ELECTRONIC MEANS** refers to all types of communication that are not face to face and that are facilitated by the use of electronic devices, including telephones, computers, tablets, or any other means.

## **B. GENERAL PRACTICE REQUIREMENTS**

**PRINCIPLE: Social workers are accountable to the people they serve, to their profession and to society. This accountability is achieved by adherence to the philosophy, purpose and standard of practice determined by the profession. Social workers are accountable to the profession through the College and must abide by the *Health Professions Act*, the *Social Workers Profession Regulation*, the *Bylaws of the College*, the *Social Work Code of Ethics*, and any direction or order given by the College. Social workers engage in collaborative practice and treat colleagues with respect.**

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### **B.1 MAINTAINING REGISTRATION**

- (a) A social worker will ensure that all obligations required to maintain registration are met and that the annual renewal forms are completed and submitted in a timely manner.
- (b) A social worker will identify him/herself to clients as a registered social worker. When asked, a social worker will provide to the client information regarding the social worker's education and experience, and show the client her/his Practice Permit.
- (c) A social worker whose registration is suspended or cancelled for any reason will cease practicing within the scope of social work until reinstated. A social worker will abide by any terms or conditions on the member's practice permit.
- (d) It is the member's responsibility to ensure that the College has current contact information at all times.

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### **B.2 PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE**

- (a) Within a professional relationship, the central focus of practice will be based on voluntary, and under some circumstances involuntary, agreements between a social worker and client.
- (b) A social worker will advocate with and on behalf of clients and for the betterment of society.



- i. A social worker is responsible for articulating the needs of and supporting clients in communicating with relevant others.
  - ii. A social worker will take reasonable actions to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, with special regard to disadvantaged or oppressed groups and persons.
  - iii. A social worker will make reasonable efforts to promote conditions that encourage respect for the diversity of cultures that constitute society.
  - iv. A social worker will make reasonable efforts to advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions and to promote social justice.
- (c) A social worker is responsible to provide competent professional services to all clients.
- i. A social worker recognizes that a social worker-client relationship may exist outside the workplace where a person is asking for information, services, or supports based on the individual's recognition of the social worker's professional expertise.
  - ii. A social worker is responsible for professional advice or services rendered whether or not there is a formal agreement for services or any payment received.
- (d) A social worker will make reasonable efforts to keep clients informed when they are unable to meet a request or have other commitments that may have implications for the client.

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### B.3 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- (a) A social worker will be aware of the circumstances that may lead to or be perceived as a conflict of interest and will make reasonable effort to avoid such conflict. If conflict of interest cannot be avoided the social worker will disclose the conflict to relevant parties as appropriate and take measures to minimize the impact of the conflict on clients, coworkers, and employers.
- (b) When a social worker's professional responsibilities to an organization and to a client are in conflict, a social worker will attempt to safeguard client rights and promote changes by bringing the situation to the attention of the organization and attempting to facilitate a satisfactory resolution of the conflict. When a conflict of interest cannot be satisfactorily resolved, a social worker will:
- i. cease acting for the client (See section B7 for additional information.); or

- ii. if the nature of the service is such that the social worker cannot cease acting for the client, document the conflict of interest and all measures taken to try to resolve the conflict of interest.
- (c) A social worker who intends to provide or provides professional social work services through more than one organization will advise each organization of any potential conflict of interest.

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#### B.4 CONSENT FOR SERVICES

- (a) A social worker will obtain informed consent from a client before providing professional services to the client. A social worker will give to each client an accurate account of the professional services to be provided:
- i. before starting services and at any time the social worker is proposing a change to the services being provided; and
  - ii. detailing any potential risks to the client.
- (b) Where services are mandated the principles of informed consent will be applied as much as is reasonable for the given circumstances.
- (c) A social worker will obtain written informed consent from a client before professional services provided to the client are observed by others or electronically recorded for academic, supervision, research, or consultation purposes.
- (d) A social worker will discuss with clients how consent for services may be withdrawn.

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#### B.5 CONSENT TO SHARE INFORMATION

- (a) Except where otherwise permitted by these Standards (see section D7), a social worker will obtain informed consent from a client prior to releasing any information about the client to any other party. Informed consent includes providing clear information regarding:
- i. With whom the information will be shared;
  - ii. What information will be shared;
  - iii. The intended purpose for sharing the information;

- iv. Whether the client has a right to request that identifying information be excluded; and
  - v. Any other information particular to the specific request that a reasonable person would want to know.
- (b) In all circumstances where information about a client is being released, with or without the consent of the client, the following principles apply:
- i. Information will only be released to those who “need to know”;
  - ii. Only the minimum amount of information required to address the need will be released;
  - iii. The client will be provided with information on how the information is intended to be used;
  - iv. The client may withdraw consent at any time.
- (c) Where legislation or agency policy permits sharing information without client consent, a social worker will still seek consent unless there is an urgent need to release the information without consent.
- (d) In all circumstances, the collection, use and disclosure of client information is subject to the legislation applicable to the place of employment which, in Alberta, may be the Health Information Act (HIA), the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP) or the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA).
- (e) When information about a client is required from other sources, a social worker will make a reasonable effort to explain this to the client, decide with the client what other sources are to be used and seek agreement on the method of obtaining the needed information.
- (f) When information is required by law, a social worker will help the client understand the consequences, if any, of refusing to provide the required information.

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## B.6 USE OF ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

- (a) A social worker will receive training and supervision as appropriate prior to using assessment instruments independently.
- (b) A social worker will provide a client with clear information to facilitate the client’s understanding of the social worker’s assessment.
- (c) A social worker will identify deficiencies in information or information gathering activities that could compromise the validity or interpretations of and conclusions drawn in assessments.

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## B.7 PROFESSIONAL OPINION

- (a) A social worker will provide a professional opinion about a client only when it is based on sufficient and substantial information about the client.
- (b) A social worker will treat with respect and represent accurately and fairly the qualifications, views and findings of colleagues.
- (c) When there is a difference of opinion between a social worker and a colleague, the social worker will use appropriate channels to express judgment on these matters, confining such comments to matters of fact and matters of their own knowledge. Where possible and appropriate, the social worker will discuss any concerns with the colleague before taking any other action.

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## B.8 TERMINATION OF SERVICES

- (a) A social worker will continue to provide the opportunity for a client to receive professional services from the social worker until:
  - i. the service goals have been met,
  - ii. the professional services are no longer required,
  - iii. it is reasonably clear to the social worker or to the client that the professional services are not achieving the agreed purposes,
  - iv. a conflictual dual/multiple role relationship exists or arises, or
  - v. the social worker has reason to believe that the client poses a threat to the social worker's personal safety.
- (b) In the case of 3 or 4 above, the social worker will provide a list of alternative resources or a referral to another professional if requested by the client.

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## B.9 PROFESSIONAL SERVICES FROM MULTIPLE SOURCES

- (a) A social worker will not provide professional services to a client if the social worker is aware that the client is receiving similar professional services from another professional without ensuring that the services are being coordinated. If the client refuses to consent to coordination of services, the social worker will advise the client that the receipt of uncoordinated similar professional services may cause risks to the client's well-being and refuse to provide any services except for critical services.

- (b) If the client consents, the social worker will advise other professionals referred to in section B.9(a) of the fact that the client is receiving similar professional services from each of them and the nature of the professional services that the social worker is providing.
- (c) The social worker will document the client's decision with respect to providing consent and with respect to the action taken by the social worker.

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#### B.10 CONTINUITY OF CARE

- (a) A social worker will make arrangements for another social worker or suitable professional to deal with emergency needs of clients during periods of reasonably foreseeable absence by the social worker.
- (b) A social worker who serves the clients of colleagues during a temporary absence or emergency will serve those clients with the same consideration as that afforded any client.
- (c) A social worker will not assume professional responsibility for the clients of another organization or a colleague without appropriate communication with that organization or colleague to ensure continuity of care.
- (d) When a social worker in private practice is taking extended leave or closing their practice for any reason, client names, contact information, or files shall not be transferred to another practitioner without the client's consent.
- (e) A social worker who replaces or is replaced by a colleague in professional practice will act with consideration for the interest, character and reputation of that colleague.

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#### B.11 REFERRAL

- (a) A social worker will make or recommend a referral to another professional, technical or administrative resource when a referral is clearly in the best interests of the client.
- (b) A social worker will make reasonable efforts to refer a client when requested to do so by the client.
- (c) A social worker will not refer clients or accept a referral for a fee, non-monetary reward or any other personal benefit.

- (d) A social worker will not refer clients to any practitioner who is known to be practicing in a manner not consistent with social work values and ethics or make any other referral that the social worker does not believe is in the client's best interest.
- (e) If a client requests a referral for a service the social worker believes is not in the client's best interests and that is not consistent with social work values and ethics, the social worker should explain their concerns about the practice with the client.

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#### B.12 SOLICITATION OF BUSINESS

- (a) A social worker will not in any manner encourage or ask a client to solicit business on behalf of a social worker.
- (b) A social worker will not solicit the clients of colleagues.

### C. FEES AND STATEMENTS

**Principle: Social workers in private practice are responsible for determining their own fee schedule.**

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#### C.1 DISCLOSURE OF COST OF SERVICES

- (a) A social worker will disclose the fee schedule and policies related to fees to the client or a third party payer at the outset of their relationship.
- (b) A social worker will have fee policies with regard to:
  - late fees;
  - i. missed appointments;
  - ii. clients with financial difficulty; and
  - iii. services to clients when insurance reaches the maximum.
- (c) A self-employed social worker may properly make social work services available by charging a reduced fee or no fee at all to a client(s) who would have difficulty in paying the fee.

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#### C.2 REASONABLENESS OF FEE

- (a) A social worker will not exploit a client by charging a fee that is excessive for the professional services performed.
- (b) A self-employed social worker's bill will reflect only services actually rendered and reasonable penalties for appointments missed or cancelled without adequate notice from the client.

## D. RECORD KEEPING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

**Principle: Social workers will maintain records appropriate to the type of service being provided. Social workers will protect the confidentiality of all professionally acquired information and will disclose such information only when properly authorized or obligated legally or professionally to do so.**

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### D.1 OWNERSHIP OF RECORDS

- (a) The case record itself is the property of a self-employed social worker and is subject to their control except as required by law.
- (b) In employment situations, the case record is the property and responsibility of the organization and subject to employer control.
- (c) A social worker contracted to provide services to the public will maintain a personal record of clients served, services provided, dates of contact, and where the case file is maintained if it is not with the social worker.

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### D.2 CONTENTS OF RECORDS

- (a) A social worker will keep systematic, timely, and legible records.
- (b) A social worker will explain to a client the purposes for which information will be collected and used.
- (c) A social worker will obtain information directly from the client unless the client is incapable of giving reliable information or when corroboration is required as in completing risk assessments, preparing a home or community study, assessing mental health concerns or investigating/assessing criminal behaviour (probation, parole, corrections, and forensic work).
- (d) A social worker will maintain the following information in a client record:
  - i. each client's full name, address and telephone number;
  - ii. if the client is a corporation or organization, the name, address and telephone number of the corporation or organization and the name, address, telephone number and title of the principal contacts in the corporation or organization;
  - iii. a brief description of the professional services requested and provided and the location and dates when those services were requested and provided;
  - iv. any fee arrangement;

- v. a copy of all reports and other documents prepared or received as part of a professional relationship;
  - vi. clear identification of the author of any documents and reports in the record;
  - vii. reasons for professional involvement, the assessment, interventions, goals, progress toward the goals, and relevant information arising from the informed consent process;
  - viii. clear identification, including name and contact information, of the source of any client information not provided directly by the client; and
  - ix. clear indication of when and why the file was closed.
- (e) A social worker, in accordance with workplace policies, may use any form of technology for keeping records, provided the confidentiality of the information contained in the record is maintained.
- (f) A social worker will ensure that all information recorded is necessary and either relevant to the services being requested by or provided to the client or needed for organization administration.
- (g) When a couple, family, organization, community or other group is the client, a social worker must keep a record that relates to the couple, family, organization, community or other group.

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### D.3 CLIENT ACCESS TO RECORDS

- (a) A social worker will provide:
- i. access to a record to any client who is the subject of that record, on the request of the client and subject to any limitations required by law, and
  - ii. information to each client about the conditions under which access will be provided or denied to a client pursuant to clause (1), and
  - iii. a copy of the file or parts of the file, subject to a reasonable fee, as may be required by relevant legislation.
- (b) A social worker working with a person under the age of majority who has not been designated as a mature minor or as an adult and who has a guardian will discuss with the relevant parties, where appropriate, who will have access to all or parts of the record. The



discussion and any agreement reached with regard to access shall be recorded on the client file.

- (c) A social worker will be aware of any limitations that relevant legislation may impose on client access to records and will inform the client when a request for information cannot be met.

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#### D.4 MAINTENANCE AND DISPOSAL

- (a) A social worker will store records in a way that maintains the confidentiality of the information contained in the records.
- (b) A social worker will adopt retention policies and procedures that will physically safeguard case records against any anticipated threats or hazards to their security or integrity.
- (c) When a social worker's documentation is part of the workplace's permanent record, retention of such records must be done in accordance with organizational policies.
- (d) A social worker will maintain professional records for 10 years following the last entry for a professional service. Where an organization maintains both a paper and an electronic file, only one (1) complete file must be maintained following closure of the file.
- (e) A social worker will maintain records related to children and youth for 10 years following the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday of the youngest person identified in the record.
- (f) A social worker will dispose of records in a manner that ensures that the confidentiality of information in the records is maintained.
- (g) A social worker who is closing a practice will ensure that client files are maintained in a secure location for 10 years following the last entry for a professional service.
- (h) A social worker will take appropriate measures to ensure that file information can be accessed by clients as appropriate within a 10-year period following closure, and that clients are aware that the information will be kept, where it will be kept, and how they may access the information if needed.
- (i) A social worker in private practice must have a plan in place for maintenance of files should the social worker die or become incapacitated.
- (j) A social worker will be aware of any legal requirements that may apply to closed files under their control in specific situations including but not limited to circumstances in which files must be retained for a period longer than 10 years, access by family members following death of a client, and requirements related to professional liability insurance.

- (k) A social worker will continue to treat any information about a client as confidential after the professional relationship has ended.

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## D.5 CONFIDENTIALITY

- (a) A social worker will safeguard the confidentiality of the information obtained in the course of practice, including while teaching, providing supervision, conducting research or other professional duties.
- (b) Except as noted in section D.6, a social worker will disclose information about a client to others only with documented informed consent from the client. (For further information, see section B.5.)
- (c) When a corporation or other organization is the client, standards of confidentiality apply to information pertaining to the organization, including personal information about individuals when obtained in the proper course of that contract.
- (d) A social worker will promote the adoption of contracts, reasonable policies and procedures in both the workplace and academic institutions, concerning confidentiality guidelines for students who take material from the field into the classroom.
- (e) When a case report or other confidential information is used as the basis of teaching, research or other published report, a social worker shall ensure that the information does not identify the client.
- (f) A social worker will ascertain and make clear, to both organizational and individual clients, the limits of confidentiality. Where appropriate, the social worker will give to the client a written description of the limits of confidentiality.
- (g) A social worker will transfer client information to another organization or individual only with the informed consent of the client and then only with reasonable assurance that the receiving organization provides the same guarantee of confidentiality and respect for the right of privileged communication as provided by these standards.
- (h) A social worker will inform clients that supervision and professional consultation are part of professional social work practice and that confidential information may be shared as part of the process.

- (i) When professional services are provided to more than one client during a joint session, a social worker will, at the beginning of the professional relationship, clarify the manner in which confidentiality will be handled.
- (j) A social worker in practice with families, couples, groups, organizations, or communities must safeguard the rights to privacy and confidentiality of information acquired concerning individuals.
  - i. Information that one client has requested be kept confidential will not be disclosed without the informed consent of the person(s) to whom that information refers.
  - ii. When one person provides consent to the release of confidential records or information, a social worker may release only information about the consenting person and must protect the confidentiality of all information about the non-consenting person(s).
- (k) When social work services have been contracted for a client by a third party, a social worker will clarify with all parties prior to providing the services the rules of confidentiality and any obligations regarding information that must be provided to the third party.

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## D.6 LEGALLY DEPENDENT PERSONS

- (a) A social worker working with a person under the age of majority who has not been designated a mature minor or who has a guardian will discuss with the relevant parties, where appropriate, the limit the law imposes on the right to confidentiality with respect to communications with the social worker.

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## D.7 DISCLOSURE OF CLIENT INFORMATION

- (a) Notwithstanding section D.5, a social worker may disclose information about a client without the client's consent in the following situations:
  - i. when a social worker believes that disclosure is necessary to protect against a clear and substantial risk that the client will inflict imminent serious harm on self or others;

- ii. when a social worker is required by a provincial or federal Act or regulation or a court order to disclose the information;
  - iii. to a collection agency if it is necessary in order to collect a fee;
  - iv. when the information is required for a social worker to defend against a complaint of unprofessional conduct;
  - v. when directed to do so by an investigator or prosecutor of a complaint under the *Health Professions Act*.
- (b) When disclosure is required by order of a court, a social worker will not divulge more information than is reasonably required and will, when possible, notify the client of this requirement. In cases in which a subpoena is served to obtain confidential information about a client, a social worker will attempt to protect the client's right to privacy by seeking to limit the amount of information entered into the public record.
- (c) A social worker is not responsible for unauthorized disclosure by a client who is party to a joint session.
- (d) A social worker will seek legal advice with regard to maintaining client confidentiality when there is a significant risk of harm related to possible disclosure of the information.

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## D.8 RECORD MANAGEMENT

- (a) A social worker will ensure that supervisory, administrative and other indirect service personnel maintain client confidentiality.
- (b) A social worker may disclose information to persons within their organization who, by virtue of their responsibilities, have an identified need to know.
- (c) A social worker will take reasonable efforts to establish organizational confidentiality policies regarding:
- i. who does and does not have access to what kinds of information, and
  - ii. orientation to the principles of confidentiality for all staff, volunteers, and others who may have access to confidential information.

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## D.9 PROTECTION, PRIVACY AND SECURITY OF ELECTRONIC RECORDS

- (a) A social worker who is implementing or changing an electronic record-keeping system must complete a privacy impact assessment addressing how client information is to be managed, any potential risks to privacy, and plans to mitigate risks.
- (b) A social worker in private practice who maintains electronic records will have policies for electronic data management. While policies will vary depending on whether the social worker is in sole private practice or working in a shared system and whether the social worker employs or contracts third parties to conduct parts of the practice, the social worker should consider each of the following items:
- i. data management processes, including who is responsible for privacy;
  - ii. what information will be entered in the electronic record, who is responsible for data entry, and processes to ensure that the information placed on the record is necessary;
  - iii. plans for ensuring that employees, students, and others who may have access to the client records understand what they may or may not access related to individual clients;
  - iv. how the information that is collected from clients may be used or disclosed;
  - v. how long the files will be maintained and how they will be disposed of at the end of that period;
  - vi. security systems that will be in place for both the physical equipment and the information maintained in the electronic record;
  - vii. access to client records in case of client emergency or inability to access the social worker;
  - viii. the data back-up system;
  - ix. how access to electronic records will be logged and monitored;
  - x. correcting information in an electronic record;
  - xi. how any breach of privacy will be managed;

- xii. how people within the organization will be educated on appropriate use of the electronic information and how it will be managed to ensure confidentiality/privacy is maintained;
  - xiii. processes for disclosure of electronic data, including making referrals, providing information to other professionals engaged with the client, communicating information to the client, and other disclosures permitted by these standards or relevant privacy legislation; and
  - xiv. how changes to the system will be monitored to ensure that privacy is maintained.
- (c) When a social worker contracts a third party to manage electronic records or for IT support, the social worker will require the contracted party to agree to all privacy conditions.
- (d) A social worker must ensure that all electronic data management is in compliance with the relevant privacy legislation.

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## D.10 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY

- (a) When a social worker requests information from another party, the social worker will inform the provider that the client's record is open to the client at the client's request subject to any applicable legislation.

## E. COMPETENCE

**Principle: Social workers will be competent in the performance of the services and functions they undertake on behalf of the persons they serve.**

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### E.1 KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS/ABILITIES

- (a) A social worker will have adequate knowledge to meet standard of practice requirements. This includes but is not limited to knowledge of:
- i. social institutions, formal organizations, and social work as a distinct professional discipline;

- ii. social work theory;
- iii. professional ethics;
- iv. social policy and relevant law;
- v. social work intervention methods, including human development and functioning, cultural and environmental functioning and patterns of social interaction.

(b) A social worker will have adequate skills to meet standard of practice requirements. This includes but is not limited to skills in the following tasks:

- i. interviewing;
- ii. assessment;
- iii. intervention;
- iv. communication;
- v. documentation;
- vi. consultation;
- vii. supervision;
- viii. evaluation.

(c) A social worker will have adequate ability to meet standard of practice requirements. This includes but is not limited to the ability to:

- i. use interpersonal communication skills to
  - 1. provide clear explanations of professional and workplace roles;
  - 2. establish the expectation of mutual participation in the change process;
  - 3. clarify the need to gather sufficient and appropriate information for the services requested or provided;
  - 4. determine whether the client has sufficient understanding of the matters being
  - 5. discussed to give informed consent;
  - 6. implement the requirement of informed consent;
  - 7. provide appropriate information to clients with respect to assessments, the nature of the helping process, alternative modes of intervention and innovative intervention possibilities.

- ii. make a prompt and reasonable report when required.
- iii. use consultation and supervision in the management of professional relationships with clients and the application of practice methods.

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## E.2 CULTURAL COMPETENCE

- (a) A social worker will acknowledge and respect the impact that their own heritage, values, beliefs and preferences can have on their practice and on clients whose background and values may be different from their own
- (b) A social worker will be able to work with a wide range of people who are culturally different from the social worker or who may be considered to be members of vulnerable populations on the basis of attributes such as those listed in section F.1(a).
- (c) A social worker will obtain a working knowledge and understanding of their clients' racial and cultural affiliations, identities, values, beliefs and customs and will be able to apply this knowledge in the provision of services.
- (d) When possible, a social worker will provide or secure social work services in the language chosen by the client. If using an interpreter, the social worker will, when possible, engage an independent and qualified professional interpreter.

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## E.3 TECHNOLOGY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

- (a) A social worker will be proficient in the technological skills and tools required for competent and ethical practice within their place of employment and scope of practice, and will seek appropriate training and consultation to stay current with emerging relevant technologies.
- (b) Where reasonably possible, a social worker will keep informed about technology that will increase the quality of program operations and service delivery and will invest in and maintain such systems.
- (c) A social worker who uses telephonic or other electronic means to provide services will strive to become and remain knowledgeable about the dynamics of online/electronic relationships, the advantages and drawbacks of non-face-to-face interactions, and the ways in which technology-based social work practice can be safely and appropriately conducted.



- (d) A social worker who uses telephonic or other electronic means to provide services to clients in another jurisdiction will abide by all regulations of their professional practice with the understanding that their practice may be subject to regulation in both the jurisdiction in which the client receives services and the jurisdiction in which the social worker provides the services. Where a social worker is providing services to clients who live outside Alberta, the social worker will ensure that clients know that the social worker's registration is in Alberta and that the client may file a complaint with the ACSW.
- (e) A social worker who uses telephonic or other electronic means to provide services will represent themselves to the public accurately.
- (f) A social worker who uses telephonic or other electronic means to provide services will make reasonable efforts to verify client identity and contact information.
- (g) A social worker will have a policy for dealing with risk management related to clients served from a distance.
- (h) A social worker will select and develop online methods, skills, and techniques that are compatible with their clients' culture and environment.
- (i) A social worker will use appropriate technologies to address e-practice demands for confidentiality, security of communications, and record keeping. All electronic record keeping will comply with the standards outlined in section D on Record Keeping and Confidentiality.
- (j) A social worker who uses telephonic or other electronic means to provide services will seek training as necessary to stay current with emerging technologies, and demonstrate competence in the use of technology-assisted devices used in practice, especially in the matter of protecting confidentiality and security.
- (k) A social worker will address the identifiable risks, benefits and limitations of social work services provided through the electronic medium chosen when obtaining consent to provide services electronically. .
- (l) A social worker conducting, evaluating, disseminating, or implementing research using technological approaches shall do so in a manner that ensures ethical credibility and [with](#) the informed consent of participants.
- (m) When using or providing supervision and consultation by technological means, a social worker will follow the standards that would be applied to a face-to-face supervisory relationship, and will be competent in the technologies used.
- (n) A social worker will be aware of and follow workplace policies related to information technology as it relates to their practice.

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#### E.4 LIMITS ON PRACTICE AND ADDING NEW SERVICES AND TECHNIQUES

- (a) A social worker will make reasonable and continuous efforts to upgrade and use effectively the values, knowledge and skills of professional practice.
- (b) A social worker will limit her or his practice to areas in which the social worker has gained competence through education, training or supervised experience.
- (c) Where a social worker does not have sufficient knowledge/skill/ability to provide a service that is requested, the social worker will
  - i. develop the competence to complete the task;
  - ii. decline to act; or
  - iii. obtain the client's consent to consult or collaborate with, or refer to, a social worker or other professional who is competent on that matter.
- (d) A social worker, when developing competency in a professional service or technique that is either new to the social worker or new to the profession, will engage in ongoing consultation with other social workers or suitable professionals who are knowledgeable in the area and will seek appropriate education and training in the area.

#### F. PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

**Principle: Social workers will acknowledge the place of privilege they hold in all professional relationships, and the potential for harm to others should that privilege be misused. Social workers will consider the potential risk to others based on the nature of the professional relationship prior to entering any dual/multiple role relationship. Social workers recognize that they alone are responsible for managing the professional relationship in a manner that prevents harm to their client.**

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#### F.1 DIGNITY OF CLIENTS

- (a) A social worker will not impose any stereotypes on a client based on behaviour, values or roles related to race, ethnicity, religion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status, income source or amount, political affiliation, disability or diagnosis,

language, or national origin, that would interfere with the provision of professional services to the client.

- (b) A social worker will use reasonable advocacy and other intervention activities to ensure that the dignity, individuality and rights of their clients are safeguarded.
- (c) A social worker will respect client motivation, capacity and opportunity for change at all times during the professional relationship and use this knowledge appropriately to facilitate the attainment of intended outcomes.
- (d) A social worker's professional relationship with voluntary and involuntary clients will be developed in the principle of mutuality. In the case of the involuntary client, mutual agreements may not exist at the outset of the relationship but a social worker's reasonable adherence to the principle of mutuality is expected.
- (e) A social worker will take care to reasonably manage all parameters of authority involved in social control responsibilities and act to protect clients from undue influence and abusive use of power or expert position.
- (f) When it is apparent that a client, voluntary or involuntary, has misunderstood the intended interdependence of the professional relationship, the social worker will explain and renegotiate so that the client is fully advised of and encouraged to participate in an atmosphere of mutuality.
- (g) A social worker will recognize when the services being provided are no longer effective, necessary, or in the client's best interest and will discuss the options available with the client.

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## F.2 DIGNITY OF OTHERS

- (a) A social worker will respect the dignity of supervisees, students and research subjects and will comply with all relevant statutes and administrative rules concerning conduct toward supervisees, students and research subjects.
- (b) A social worker who has the responsibility for hiring or evaluating the performance of other staff members will fulfill such responsibilities in a fair, considerate and equitable manner, using clearly defined criteria.

- (c) A social worker who has the responsibility for evaluating the performance of colleagues, employees, supervisees or students will share their evaluations with them.
- (d) A social worker who is responsible for the administration and supervision of personnel will protect the confidentiality of personnel records.
- (e) A social worker providing practice/clinical supervision is responsible and accountable for the services provided by a student or supervisee. The social worker will provide an adequate level of supervision to both be aware of the supervisee's strengths and limitations and to meet the developmental needs of the student or supervisee.
- (f) A social worker engaged in research will ensure that the consent of participants in the research is voluntary and informed, without any implied deprivations or penalty for refusal to participate, and with due regard for participants' privacy and dignity. The standards in section B.5 also apply to sharing information for research purposes.
- (g) A social worker engaged in research will protect participants from unwarranted physical or mental discomfort, distress, harm, danger or deprivation.
- (h) A social worker will ensure that any research their clients are being asked to participate in has through an ethics review process.

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### F.3 EXPLOITATION

- (a) A social worker will not exploit a client, colleague, supervisee, student or research subject in any manner.
- (b) A social worker will not exploit a professional relationship to obtain a position or otherwise advance the social worker's own interests.
- (c) A social worker will not condone nor engage in any harassment or workplace bullying.

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#### F.4 IMPAIRED ABILITY TO PERFORM

- (a) A social worker will maintain a reasonable level of self-awareness necessary to appropriately manage personal needs, feelings, values and limitations in the context of a professional relationship.
- (b) A social worker will maintain reasonable health and well-being as a recognized component of competent practice.
- (c) A social worker will not initiate or continue a professional relationship when a social worker's ability to provide a professional service is impaired due to substance use/abuse, addictions, or mental, emotional or physical condition.
- (d) If a condition referred to in section F.4(c) develops after a professional relationship has been initiated, a social worker will
  - i. terminate or suspend the relationship in an appropriate manner,
  - ii. notify the client in writing of the termination or suspension, and
  - iii. assist the client in obtaining services from another professional if appropriate.
- (e) A social worker whose ability to provide professional services is impaired will seek supervision in developing a plan for managing responsibilities to clients and others as may be appropriate. Where the social worker does not have a direct supervisor/manager the social worker will consult with a colleague.
- (f) A social worker whose ability to provide professional services is impaired will seek help to remedy the condition.
- (g) A social worker who is aware of a colleague who may be practicing while impaired is obligated to take reasonable measures to ensure that clients are not being harmed. Measures may include speaking directly with the colleague or reporting to a supervisor. If these measures are not effective the social worker must report the impairment to the colleague's regulatory body.

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#### F.5 DUAL/MULTIPLE ROLE RELATIONSHIP

- (a) A social worker will act to ensure that the difference between professional and personal relationships with clients is explicitly understood and respected, and that the social worker's behaviour is appropriate to this difference.
- (b) A social worker will be aware of the potential for harm in entering or continuing a professional relationship when the social worker and the client also have a present or previous familial, social, sexual, emotional, financial, supervisory, administrative or legal relationship.
- (c) If a dual/multiple role relationship other than those noted in section F.7 below develops or is discovered after the professional relationship has been initiated, the social worker will seek supervision or, where no supervisor exists, consultation regarding the relationship and
  - i. discuss the possible consequences of the dual/multiple role relationship with the client and,
  - ii. terminate the professional relationship if it is in the client's best interests to do so, and,
  - iii. if necessary, assist the client in obtaining professional services from another social worker or another professional.
- (d) The social worker will document all actions taken, the reasons for the actions, and the client's response, in the client's record.
- (e) A social worker who continues to provide professional services when a dual/multiple role relationship may exist must seek regular consultation/supervision with another social worker regarding the dual/multiple role relationship and subsequent provision of professional services to the client and include the contents of the consultation in the client's record.
- (f) In all cases when a dual/multiple role relationship exists the social worker is solely responsible for ensuring that appropriate professional boundaries are maintained and that the nature of the client-social worker relationship is protected.
- (g) Where a social worker's personal circumstances result in frequent contact with clients outside the practice setting, a social worker will take reasonable measures to discuss with all clients how contacts outside the professional context will be managed to protect the clients' interests.

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## F.6 SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- (a) A dual/multiple role relationship does not excuse a social worker from providing professional services in an emergency situation such as family violence or child protection.
- (b) Notwithstanding section F.5, a social worker who is in a dual/multiple role relationship may continue the professional relationship when unique attributes, specialized skills or services are required and are not otherwise available.

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## F.7 PROHIBITED RELATIONSHIP

- (a) A social worker who is currently providing or has in the previous twenty-four (24) months provided professional services to a client will not
  - i. engage in sexual or romantic relations with the client, or
  - ii. enter into a financial relationship with the client in which there is an ongoing exchange such as a business partnership, and employer/employee relationship, or a contractual relationship.

## G. PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

**Principle: Social workers will act to promote excellence in the social work profession.**

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### G.1 WITHIN THE PROFESSION

- (a) A social worker is legally and ethically obligated to adhere to the *Health Professions Act*, the Social Workers Profession Regulation, the ACSW Bylaws, the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice, regardless of workplace policies.
- (b) A social worker will not act in a manner that may reduce the public trust in social work and social workers.
  - i. a social worker will be aware of how their personal behaviours, activities, and representations may reflect on the profession. This will include considering what

type of content is appropriate to place in a public medium such as social networking and in other forms of communication.

- (c) A social worker who has a concern with regard to a colleague's ethics, practice, opinions, or behaviour will make reasonable efforts to address the concern with the colleague. However, if there is a risk of harm to a client or the concern continues, the social worker will consult with their supervisor/manager or the Complaints Director of the Alberta College of Social Workers.
- (d) A social worker who has reason to believe, and believes, that a social worker has violated the *Health Professions Act*, the Social Workers Profession Regulation, the ACSW Bylaws, the Standards of Practice, or the Code of Ethics, will inform the Complaints Director of the Alberta College of Social Workers of the violation.
- (e) When information about a violation is obtained from a client, a social worker will notify the client of the social worker's obligation to report the information to the Alberta College of Social Workers.
- (f) If a client refuses to consent to release of their name, a social worker will report the violation without providing information that would identify the client unless the report falls within mandatory reporting clauses in other legislation such as those that apply to a child in need of protection.
- (g) A social worker will have ongoing practice/clinical supervision or peer consultation appropriate to their field of practice and setting.
- (h) A social worker who is providing or receiving supervision to fulfill requirements related to obtaining registration, providing restricted activities, joining the Clinical Specialty Registry, or as a result of an order by a Hearing Tribunal, the Registrar, the Registration Committee, or the Competence Committee will ensure that the supervision is conducted in accordance with the specific requirements as defined in the Social Workers Profession Regulation, ACSW policies, or the specific order.
- (i) When a social worker provides supervision, the supervision must be ethical, competent and consistent with these standards of practice. A social worker who is responsible for the supervision of others will
  - i. be aware of the different types of supervision and multiple responsibilities of a supervisor;



- ii. participate in continuing competence activities related to the provision of supervision; and
  - iii. keep appropriate records of supervision.
- (j) A social worker will promote the development of the social work profession through activities including mentoring, supervising students, participating in research, publishing and presenting practice information that may be helpful to others, or similar activities.

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## G.2 OTHER PROFESSIONS

- (a) A social worker who has a concern with regards to another professional's ethics, practices, opinions, or behavior, will make reasonable efforts to address the concern with that person. However, if there is a risk of harm to a client or the concern continues, the social worker will consult with the Complaints Director of the relevant professional body.
- (b) A social worker who has reason to believe, and believes, that there may have been a violation of any other profession's standards will inform the appropriate college of the violation.
- (c) When information about an alleged violation is obtained from a client, a social worker will notify the client of the social worker's obligation to report the information to the appropriate regulatory body.
- (d) If a client refuses to consent to release of their name, a social worker will report the alleged violation to the appropriate college without providing information that would identify the client unless the report falls within mandatory reporting clauses in other legislation such as those that apply to a child in need of protection.
- (e) A social worker will be respectful to and cooperate with colleagues.

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## G.3 ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

- (a) A social worker is accountable and responsible to the employer in the performance of her or his duties.
  - i. A social worker who disagrees with the direction given by the employer or supervisor will discuss any concerns directly with the employer/supervisor,

- providing a rationale for the disagreement and offering an alternative if appropriate.
- ii. If the social worker and the employer/supervisor continue to disagree the social worker will document the discussion and outcome in the appropriate record.
  - iii. If an employer/supervisor demands that a social worker act in a manner that is contradictory to the social work Code of Ethics or Standards of Practice, the social worker is expected to apply professional judgment in deciding what action to take.
- (b) A social worker will make reasonable efforts to prevent and eliminate discrimination and oppression in the workplace.
  - (c) A social worker who intends to provide or provides professional social work services through more than one organization will fully disclose all intentions and activities to each organization.
  - (d) A social worker will not engage clients in private practice who is also clients of an organization where the social worker is employed except when contractually agreed to with the employer.

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#### G.4 REPRESENTATION OF QUALIFICATIONS AND SERVICES

- (a) A social worker will identify and describe education, training, experience, professional affiliations, competence, nature of service, and actions in an honest and accurate manner.
- (b) Educational credentials will be cited only when they have been received from an institution of higher education recognized by ACSW.

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#### G.5 MISREPRESENTATION OF QUALIFICATIONS

- (a) A social worker will not misrepresent, directly or by implication,
  - i. the academic or other qualifications of the social worker,
  - ii. the registration status of the social worker, or
  - iii. the purposes or characteristics of the institutions and organizations with which the social worker is associated.

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## G.6 FALSE OR MISLEADING INFORMATION

- (a) A social worker will not include false or misleading information in statements concerning professional services offered by the social worker.
- (b) A social worker will not make a false, misleading or exaggerated claim of efficacy regarding past or anticipated achievement, with respect to clients, scholarly pursuits or contributions to society.
- (c) A social worker will take reasonable care to distinguish between public statements and actions made as a private citizen and those made as a representative of the social work profession.

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## G.7 MISREPRESENTATION OF SERVICES OR PRODUCTS

- (a) A social worker will not be associated with or permit their name to be used in connection with any service or product in such a way as to misrepresent
  - i. the service or product,
  - ii. the degree of the social worker's responsibility for the service or product, or
  - iii. the nature of the social worker's association with the service or product.
- (b) A social worker may only take credit for work they have done in connection with scholarly and research endeavours, and must fairly credit contributions to the work made by others.
- (c) A social worker must reserve authorship on scholarly publications or reports to the persons who have made a substantial intellectual contribution to the publication or report.
- (d) Administrative, editorial, financial and directed work contributions must be acknowledged in appropriate footnotes or other acknowledgments.

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## G.8 FRAUD OR DECEPTION

- (a) A social worker will not use fraud, misrepresentation or deception in
  - i. obtaining a certificate of registration or practice permit,
  - ii. passing a social work registration examination,

- iii. assisting another person to obtain a social work certificate of registration or to pass a social work registration examination,
- iv. billing,
- v. providing professional services,
- vi. reporting the results of social work assessments, evaluations or professional services, or
- vii. conducting any other activity related to the practice of social work.

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#### G.9 AIDING UNAUTHORIZED PRACTICE

- (a) A social worker will not aid or abet another person in misrepresenting that person's professional credentials or in illegally representing that person as a member of a regulated profession.
- (b) A social worker who is aware of a person who meets the requirements for mandatory registration as a social worker under the *Health Professions Act* who is not registered will notify that person of the obligation to apply for registration and the social worker's obligation to notify the ACSW if the person does not apply for registration.