

AASW Practice Standards Supplement

Expectations as to how
Practice
Standard 8
works
in practice

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AASW

Australian Association
of Social Workers

Purpose

This document supplements Practice Standard 8 (Professional Supervision) of the AASW *Practice Standards 2023*.

Its purpose is to set out the Australian Association of Social Worker's (AASW's) expectations as to how AASW member social workers can incorporate professional supervision into their own practice in a way that meets the practice standard, clarifies recording of professional supervision for CPD, and recognises that practitioners work in different settings and have different skill levels and expertise.

Context

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) launched a new version of practice standards in May 2023 following a lengthy consultation and review process. The *Practice Standards 2023* crystallise the core elements of practice for social workers and for those who use their services, including policymakers, employers, and other professionals working in related sectors.

Professional supervision contributes to the professional capacity of practitioners, the effectiveness of the practitioner within their organisation and in their contribution to achieving positive outcomes for the people with whom they work, and to the identity of social work as a profession. It does this by:

- further developing professional skills and knowledge that improves the competence and professional satisfaction of social workers
- providing the space for critical (self) reflection and supportive environment for practitioners to gain insight about themselves, and to respond more effectively to complex and challenging situations
- providing a forum for exploring the application of ethical and professional social work practice in the context of the social worker's practice environment.

Professional supervision typically follows a consistent underlying process, however, the way that professional supervision works in practice will differ. For instance, supervision is likely to be more structured and intense for newly qualified workers than it is for more experienced social workers. Similarly, factors such as the type of work undertaken by the social worker, the setting the social worker works in, and circumstances (such as whether the social worker is returning to practice or moving into a new area of practice) will also inform how professional supervision works in practice.

This supplement provides an overview of professional supervision, states AASW's expectations as to how professional supervision works in practice for a set of scenarios and provides considerations for effectively incorporating professional supervision in practice.

The expectation is that this supplement will inform AASW's members about how they can incorporate professional supervision so they can meet Practice Standard 8 in a way that addresses their own professional needs and unique circumstances.

Standard 8: Social workers build and strengthen their practice through regular structured supervision from social work qualified supervisors.

To meet this standard, social workers will at a minimum:

1. undertake formal supervision, relevant to their area of practice, by an appropriately trained, senior social work qualified supervisor
2. maintain a record of supervision for the duration of the supervisory relationship
3. ensure there is a clear focus in supervisory relationships on strengthening professional identity and practice, separate and distinct from line management roles
4. balance their attention to the three functions of supervision — education, support and accountability
5. use supervision to examine and critically reflect upon their personal and professional values and the implications for practice
6. use supervision to demonstrate integration of professional knowledge and theoretical approaches to practice.

Figure 1 - Practice Standard 8

What is professional supervision

Professional supervision is concerned with a social worker's development of professional working methods and competency and linking their practice to the body of social work theory and knowledge, facilitating a practitioner's engagement in reflective practice, the application of standards of ethical practice to their work, and in some cases developing practical skills and insight for navigating a workplace and complex cases.

It does so by balancing attention on three functions: **Education** where attention is focused on developing practice based knowledge, understanding and skills that will improve the competence and the professional satisfaction of the practitioner; **Support** by providing a space where social workers can become more aware of how their work is affecting them, how their personal reactions and emotional state are impacting practice, and to develop strategies to deal with such reactions; and **Accountability** which focuses on the standards for practice within the organisation and social work profession – including accountability for client outcomes.

Professional supervision can occur 'on the job' while a specific task is being carried out, in one-to-one or group meetings, and it can be conducted face-to-face, by telephone or videoconferencing. The emphasis is on performing the functions of professional supervision. The way these functions are carried out will differ according to the needs of the practitioner and their practice environment.

To provide this type of supervision, the supervisor needs to be appropriately trained and experienced and demonstrate a commitment to professional practice and currency of knowledge. They need to have a clear understanding of the contemporary professional and practice issues, legislation and policy relating to the supervisee's field of practice.

The supervisor should be a qualified and experienced social worker. They need to have a minimum of 2 years post qualifying experience relevant to the field of practice of the supervisee and they should ideally possess an AASW accredited supervisor credential. If the supervision is provided by another professional, such as a clinical psychologist, then it is important that they are aware of, and understand, AASW's code of ethics and practice standards. There also needs to be clarity in terms of how this supervisor supports the practitioner to develop their competency and practice as a social worker. AASW members will need to be able to demonstrate this as part of stating they meet the AASW practice standards.

Professional supervision is not managerial supervision, operational/line management or performance management. The focus of professional supervision is on development of

competency, understanding and methods related to the supervisee's identity as a social worker. So, while coaching may be a method utilised as part of professional supervision, "executive coaching" that is focused on developing a person's expertise and know-how as a manager (and doesn't link it to their identity as a social worker) is not considered to be professional supervision as it relates to AASW Practice Standard 8.

As professional supervision is distinct from line supervision, then either the roles of line and professional supervision need to be physically separated (e.g., a different person performs the two roles, or an external supervisor is engaged for professional supervision), or if the same person is providing both line and professional supervision, then there needs to be appropriate space and boundaries for the professional supervision arrangement to occur.

Professional supervision may be performed one-on-one or as part of a group. In group supervision, a supervisor (a senior social worker) facilitates a supervisory forum with a group of up to six professionals (social workers or a multi-disciplinary group). In these arrangements, participants can benefit from both the collaborative contributions of the group members as well as the guidance of the supervisor, who also requires skills in working with group dynamics.

Regardless of the supervisory arrangement, or combination of arrangements, that are set in place for a social worker, balanced attention needs to be given to the adequacy of the arrangement to fulfil the purpose of building a practitioner's professional competency, capacity and identity as a social worker. Attendance at staff meetings, informal de-briefing, in-service training, workshops, and seminars, while constituting valuable sources of professional development, are not substitutes for professional supervision.

Professional supervision process and record keeping

Professional supervision consists of an arrangement between a supervisee and a supervisor for a defined period (e.g., 12 months).

Underpinning a professional supervision arrangement, there is:

- Supervision Agreement
- Supervision logs / Records of Supervision
- Supervision arrangement review.

There is a requirement to maintain a record of supervision for the duration of the supervisory relationship. The **Supervision Agreement** and the **Records of Supervision** (both mentioned above) together with completion of the **Annual Supervision Report** provides the basis of the record keeping for a structured supervision arrangement.

Practice Note: Only the **Annual Supervision Report** needs to be submitted to AASW for recording of Supervision Category 1 CPD. However, other documentation should be maintained as part of meeting the minimum requirements of AASW Practice Standard 8, i.e., “to maintain a record of supervision for the duration of the supervisory relationship”.

Supervision Agreement

Underpinning a professional supervision arrangement is an agreement between the supervisor and the supervisee. The Supervision Agreement sets out:

- Goals and expected outcomes of supervision
- The structure of supervision, in terms of frequency, duration, location, required preparation, and how agendas for each session will be set
- How the supervision will be recorded, including the form that the supervision records will take, where the records will be stored, who has access to the records and under what circumstances, duration of storage, what happens to the supervision notes when the supervisor or supervisee leave their position or conclude the supervisory relationship, and what record of evidence that supervision has taken place will be kept
- Ethical considerations, particularly considerations about the confidentiality of information in the supervisor and supervisee relationship and how this confidentiality is managed.

AASW has a clinical supervision template that members may use for this purpose¹.

Supervision logs / Records of supervision

Both the supervisor and the supervisee maintain logs or records during the supervision arrangement. These may be a record of the meeting between the supervisor and the supervisee, and a reflection of the objectives that were covered during the meeting and how the discussions during that meeting can be enacted into practice.

¹ AASW Clinical Supervision Agreement template (March 2023). See: <https://my.aasw.asn.au/s/article/Clinical-supervision-agreement-template>

AASW has templates for recording professional supervision sessions².

Supervision arrangement review

At the end of the professional supervision arrangement, the supervisor and the supervisee reflect on the extent that the arrangement has met objectives, the benefits realised from the process, and if applicable, thoughts about how a future arrangement could be improved. Ideally these are the shared views of the supervisee and the supervisor.

This does not form part of AASW's Practice Standard in respect to record keeping of the professional supervision arrangement, but it is a process that the supervisor and supervisee may engage in at the conclusion of the professional supervision arrangement.

Annual Supervision Report

The Annual Supervision Report records supervision activities undertaken during the year and is submitted to AASW for CPD purposes.

The template for the Annual Supervision Report can be found on the *AASW's Practice and Career Resources* webpage³.

² For example, Record of Clinical Supervision Template. See Resources (aasw.asn.au) for a list of templates.

³ AASW Annual Supervision Report Template (March 2023). See: <https://my.aasw.asn.au/s/article/Annual-supervision-report-template>

Professional supervision in different social work settings

AASW's CPD Policy⁴ states that an AASW member needs to receive a minimum of 10 hours of supervision each year. This is a minimum standard, and the reality is that some practitioners may need a higher intensity and frequency of professional supervision based on the stage they are at in their careers and their individual circumstances.

The settings in which social workers practice include government, not-for-profit and private agencies that vary from large bureaucracies to small organisations to sole practitioner businesses. These settings may be in a metropolitan area or in a rural or remote area of Australia, or practice outside of Australia. A practitioner may be using their skills and knowledge as a social worker working directly with clients, or in a role that is not directly client facing, such as managing multi-disciplinary teams or bringing their skills and expertise to a policy or research role for example.

The types of supervisory arrangements that are in place will reflect the different locations, practice cultures, nature of practice/services, type of team (e.g., multi-disciplinary), access to experienced social work staff and priority given to professional supervision in these settings, as well as the needs of individual social work practitioners.

For instance, a recently qualified social worker is more likely to value the space and process to link their practice to social work theory and to develop self-reflection and awareness. They are likely to benefit from the process of professional supervision, including establishing learning goals, the practice of being ready for supervision, and in the practice of critical (self) reflection.

A more experienced social worker is likely to seek more clinically focused expertise, or a focus that enables them to bring their capabilities as a social worker to their practice (such as a policy maker). The method of supervision may include discussion or review of selected cases and linking the practical handling of the cases to social work theory. It may also incorporate space and a process for reflection to enable the practitioner to gain insights from their own practice.

The setting that the practitioner works within will also inform how professional supervision takes place. For example, a social worker that works in a small remote setting is more likely to utilise telephone or videoconference rather than face-to-face meetings with their supervisor.

As stated earlier, professional supervision is distinct from line supervision, and therefore, either the roles of line and professional supervision need to be physically separated (e.g., a different person performs the two roles, or an external supervisor is engaged in professional supervision). If the same person is providing both line and professional supervision, then the supervision agreement needs to clearly state how there will be appropriate space and boundaries for the professional supervision arrangement to occur.

⁴ AASW Continuing Professional Development Policy. See: <https://www.aasw.asn.au/professional/cpd/cpd-overview/>

AASW expectations as to how supervision occurs in practice

The following are recommendations for the minimum frequency of supervision and arrangements for social work practitioners in different circumstances.

Who does this apply to	Minimum frequency	Comments
Newly qualified social worker who is a graduate member of AASW	Fortnightly (60 minutes duration)	A minimum of half of the supervision comprises one-on-one formal supervision.
Experienced social workers entering a new field of practice, facing particular challenges, or re-entering workforce	Fortnightly (60 minutes duration) until competence has been attained.	Supervision at this frequency until competence has been attained. The time will vary. The Supervision Agreement should describe the competence to be attained (Goals) and the measure(s) for describing that competence has been attained (Outcomes).
Experienced social worker, working directly with clients	Monthly (60 minutes duration)	
Experienced social worker who is not working directly with clients (e.g., in Policy)	10 hours over the course of the year	

Further resources

Policy and Standards

AASW Accredited Supervisor Capability Statement (2022)

<https://my.aasw.asn.au/s/article/AASW-Supervisor-Capability-Statement>

AASW Code of Ethics (2020)

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/about-aasw/ethics-standards/code-of-ethics/>

AASW Continuing Professional Development Policy (March 2023)

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/cpd-overview/>

AASW Practice Standards (February 2023)

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/about-aasw/ethics-standards/practice-standards/>

Guides and Templates

Annual Supervision Report template

<https://my.aasw.asn.au/s/article/Annual-supervision-report-template>

Clinical Supervision Agreement template

<https://my.aasw.asn.au/s/article/Clinical-supervision-agreement-template>

Record of Clinical Supervision Session template

<https://my.aasw.asn.au/s/article/Record-of-supervision-session-template>

Other potentially useful guides and templates

[Resources \(aasw.asn.au\)](https://my.aasw.asn.au/resources)

Directories

AASW directory of supervisors

<https://my.aasw.asn.au/s/social-worker-page?pc=Supervision&tab=practice>



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