

## COMPETENCIES



## SCOPE

This guideline applies to the provision of paid support services in the community. They are relevant Australia-wide or when a client is travelling overseas with their Australian team of support worker/s.

## DISCLAIMER

*This guideline is provided to help guide best practice in the disability, aged care and community support industry. This information does not in any way replace legislative, regulatory, or contractual requirements. Users of this document should seek appropriate expert advice in relation to their circumstances. ACIA does not accept any liability on the use of this guideline.*

## BACKGROUND

- One of the key issues for Support Workers is to be able to recognise when they may be crossing the invisible line or boundary which separates a Client from a worker, and which defines the relationship as professional.
- While delivering services for a Client, a Support Worker may be at risk of breaching professional boundaries. This risk is potentially higher for long-term services when the Support Worker and Client have worked together for a long period and the professional relationship can be compromised by overfamiliarity
- It is important that Support Workers and their managers understand the importance of maintaining a professional boundary with Clients and being able to identify and report when they or a colleague may be at risk of crossing their professional boundary.
- It is an expectation that all Support Workers are trained in their organisations requirements for ethical conduct which is outlined in their Code of Conduct. Training should be provided at induction and regularly scheduled on an ongoing basis.

## PURPOSE

This guideline is to assist:

- Support Workers are expected to display the highest standard of professional and personal conduct in serving the needs of Clients and stakeholders at all times.
- Ensure that clients care and service delivery is undertaken against the assessed plan.

## DESIRED OUTCOME

- To assist Service Providers to guide their Support Workers in maintaining professional boundaries when delivering support services
- Support Workers understand how to conduct themselves in accordance with the Service Providers Code of Conduct and values at all times
- To maintain a quality and safe standard of service delivery
- To assist the Service Provider in identifying and addressing the risk of a breach in professional boundaries when delivering services to the Client, carer and family.

# DEFINITIONS & SUPPORTING INFORMATION

**Community Supports and/or Services** is defined as the provision of paid supports and services in a client's home or community. It includes but is not limited to, the following activities of daily living:

- personal care or support
- housework or domestic assistance
- transport assistance
- community access
- social support
- nursing services
- clinical supports
- gardening and home maintenance
- palliative care
- respite care

**Support Worker** - A paid person who assists people to perform tasks of daily living so as to participate in social, family and community activities in the person's home and their community. Support Workers have been commonly known in the past as attendant care worker, disability worker, aged care worker, community worker, homecare worker, care worker or paid carer.

**Service Provider** - Organisation or person accountable for the delivery of supports to Clients.

**Carer** - a person that provides supports to the Client at no cost (generally family or friend).

**Client** means the service user, participant, user, care recipient, consumer or person receiving the nursing or support services.

**Plan** means a Service Plan, Support Plan or Individual Plan (however titled – the plan) is a document developed in response to a request for service. It is developed by a Registered Nurse or a person deemed competent by the provider from the service provider, prior to the commencement of service delivery. It outlines the expected outcomes of the requested care/services and the tasks, duties and interventions required to meet the care and service needs of the client (within the parameters of the funding program). The plan guides and directs the individual support worker or Registered Nurse in their day-to-day delivery of the services.

**Registered Nurse** means a person who has completed the prescribed educational preparation, demonstrated competence for practice, and is registered and licensed with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) as a Registered Nurse.

**Competent** means having been trained and assessed by a registered nurse or enrolled nurse or approved assessor as competent to safely and appropriately perform a specified task.

**Behaviour** is the way that somebody acts especially towards other people.

**Breaches** an act of breaking or failing to observe a law, agreement, or code of conduct.

**Conduct** is the manner in which a person behaves, especially in a particular place or situation.

**Conflict of Interest** is a situation in which a person is in a position to derive personal benefit from actions or decisions made in their official capacity

**Compliance** is the action or fact of complying with a wish or command.

**Ethical Behaviour** is acting in ways consistent with what society and individuals typically think are good values. It is doing the right thing, even when no one else is around to witness it.

**Obligation** is an act or course of action to which a person is morally or legally bound, a duty or commitment.

**Professional Boundaries** can be described as rules and limits that define the nature of the relationship between a Client and the person delivering the service.

**Professional Conduct** is the high standard that you expect from a person who is well trained in a particular job.

# GUIDELINE

A definition of the term professional boundaries:

- Professional: engaged in a specified activity as one's main paid occupation rather than as a pastime;
- Boundaries: something that indicates or fixes a limit or extent.

Professional Boundaries are the legal, ethical, and organisational frameworks that protect both clients/clients and employees, or workers, from physical and emotional harm, and help to maintain a safe working relationship.

Support Worker's should be familiar with and have access to their organisations code of conduct or related policy on professional boundaries.

All Support Workers have an obligation and duty of care to:

- Comply with industry related standards of equity, justice, fairness and compassion in dealing with others within and beyond the organisation
- Perform all duties in a responsible and professional manner, with due regard for organisational policies and other legal requirements / obligations and the Client's needs and choices
- Act appropriately when a conflict arises between themselves and the Client, escalating their concerns immediately in line with the Service Providers process.

Some examples of unacceptable behaviours or practices relating to professional boundaries include but are not limited to;

- Feeling like you are the only one that understands the client;
- Favours, asking for special consideration;
- Being referred to as a friend by the client and/or their family;
- Worrying about them when you go home;
- Sharing personal information;
- Visiting the client outside your shift time;
- Staying back after the shift has been completed;
- Inappropriate body language;
- Gestures or words that would not be seen as professional;
- Jokes about relationships, sexuality or intimacy
- Physical contact which is not essential to the delivery of the support task;
- Accepting money or gifts, or loans/borrowing
- Witnessing or signing legal documents
- Or any other behaviour that may be deemed by the Client, family or other parties to compromise professional boundaries.

## Professional Conduct:

All Support Workers are expected to:

- Treat everyone with courtesy, respect, kindness, consideration, and display sensitivity towards them in relation to their rights;
- Refrain from all forms of harassment and discrimination based on gender, race, religious belief, political affiliation, pregnancy, disability, sexual orientation, or illness;
- Always act honestly, in good faith, and be respectful of the trust placed between themselves and Clients;
- Respect the Client's rights to privacy and keep personal information in confidence;
- Respect the Client's rights to take risks with due regard to the scope of their own role;
- Consider the impact of their decisions and behaviour on the well-being of others •Refrain from any personal relationship with the Client and always maintain professional boundaries;
- Seek advice from an appropriate supervisor where a colleague's behaviour is perceived to be in questionable in this area, and report any suspected lack of professional boundaries, corruption, criminal, or unethical conduct to a member of the Management Team;
- Seek advice from an appropriate supervisor where there is any uncertainty about their own relationship or interactions with a Client in relation to the maintenance of professional boundaries.

Professional Conduct expectations of support workers:

- Perform their duties diligently, impartially, conscientiously, with integrity, and to the best of their ability;
- Take responsibility for the health and safety of themselves, the Client and others when carrying out their duties;
- Strive to always achieve the highest service and professional standards;
- Comply with any relevant legislative, industrial, or administrative requirements including observance and application of anti-discrimination policy;
- Comply with the principles of environmental responsibility;
- Foster teamwork and collegiality among all employees, and always give due credit to the contributions of others;
- Maintain adequate documentation to support any decisions made;
- Take no improper advantage of any official information gained in the course of their employment;
- Refrain from allowing personal political views and/or affiliations or other personal interests to influence the performance of duties or exercise of responsibilities;
- Refrain from providing their personal details to the Client including personal contact details;
- Not contact the Client outside of their rostered hours, unless directed to do so by the service provider;
- Refrain from behaving in any other way that could be perceived as compromising professional boundaries.

## Dealing with Conflicts of Interest

All Support Workers are expected to:

- Ensure that any financial and other interests and actions do not conflict or seem to conflict with the obligations and requirements of the Service Provider
- Ensure that they do not advance their own financial or other interests over those of the Client /Service Provider
- Avoid any financial or other interest or undertaking that could directly or indirectly, compromise the performance of their duties, including the witnessing of legal documents
- Take all suitable measures to avoid or deal appropriately with any situation in which they may have or been seen to have a conflict arising out of our relationship with a Client
- Notify their management team, as appropriate, of the existence of any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest
- Declare their relationship when participating in decisions affecting another person with whom they have a personal relationship.

Service Providers should:

- Ensure that they have a documented Code of Conduct that meets legislative, contractual and industry standards that is accessible to all staff at anytime
- Maintain policies / procedures for reporting breaches in the maintenance of professional boundaries, particularly where they apply to legislative contractual and industry standard requirements
- Provide training for all staff at the commencement of employment in the organisations Code of Conduct and the importance of understanding the relevance of professional boundaries in the community setting. It is recommended that refresher training is provided every 12 months
- Give consideration to awareness training for the Client, carer and family in the importance of professional boundaries for Support Workers.

## RESOURCE DOCUMENTS

- External ACIA Guidelines 002 – Care and Service Provision in the Community
- Australian Community Industry Standards (ACIS)
- NDIS Code of Conduct