

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES

COMMUNITY SERVICES (ACQS 7)



1. Purpose

Provide Northside staff members with a clear understanding of the setting of professional boundaries in relation to employee/client relationships and to hold staff members accountable for their ethical practice and act as a basis for investigation and adjudication of formal complaints about unethical conduct in relation to the interaction and or relationship between Northside employees and clients receiving service.

2. Scope

This policy relates to all programs, service and activities undertaken by Community Service staff.

This policy relates to all clients, individuals and their family members engaged in service delivery in Community Service programs, support and services.

This policy applies to all persons employed (paid and unpaid) within Northside's Community Service Division.

This policy applies to Northside Management, Executive and Board.

3. Policy

Northside recognises the importance of setting professional boundaries as limits which protect the space between a worker's professional power and their client's vulnerability. Professional boundaries within Northside's Community Service division are expected from staff members at all times. Professional boundaries in community work are essential because workers, practitioners and volunteers build relationships with clients and often work with the most vulnerable and marginalized groups of people within a community. This includes young people and children.

Understanding professional boundaries includes recognising the potential conflicts, risks and complexities of providing support or service to individuals engaged with the organisation. Northside recognises at times this can be challenging and staff are encouraged to raise any concerns or training needs as early as possible with their Manager.

Social relationships between Northside Community Service staff and clients or their family members are not appropriate and this includes social relationships via social networking sites or electronic means.

Professional ethics within Northside's Community Service division are expected from staff members at all times.

Intentional breaches of professional boundaries will be managed in line with existing Northside procedures to ensure the safety of staff, clients, their carers and/or families.

Northside Staff, not their clients or former clients, are responsible for setting and maintaining clear and appropriate professional boundaries in all forms of communication, including face to face contact, written communication, telephone and online communications (including social networking, email, blogging and instant messaging).

Northside Staff will avoid any form of physical contact which may violate professional boundaries, result in unintentional psychological harm or damage the professional relationship. Northside Staff will remain sensitive to the variety of ways in which clients and others may interpret physical contact, with particular reference to cultural and gender differences.

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Northside Staff will use self-disclosure with circumspection, and only when it is reasonably believed that it will benefit the client. If unsure, Northside Staff will seek professional consultation or supervision to review their intention to use self-disclosure.

Northside Staff's private conduct will not compromise the fulfilment of professional responsibilities.

Northside Staff will clarify whether they are acting as private individuals or as representatives of the organisation, community or group when making public statements or performing public actions. When representing the profession or an organisation, Northside Staff will correctly reflect policies, procedures and services and distinguish between personal and official views or positions.

Northside Staff will ensure that professional relationships are not exploited to gain personal, material or financial advantage.

Where dual or multiple relationships with clients, former clients, students, supervisees or colleagues exist, or are unavoidable, Northside Staff will set and enforce explicit, appropriate professional boundaries to minimise the risk of conflict of interest, exploitation or harm.

Sexual Conduct

Northside Staff will not engage in any form of sexualised conduct with a person with whom they are directly involved in a professional relationship, including current clients, clients' relatives or significant others, students, supervisees, community members or others directly involved in a professional relationship which invites trust and confidence in the employee's role and/or involves an unequal distribution of power or authority in the employee's favour.

Northside Staff will not engage in any sexualised conduct, or enter into an intimate or sexual relationship with a person with whom they were formerly directly involved in a professional relationship, including former clients, clients' relatives or significant others. In circumstances where any such relationship is considered, it is essential that the employee undertakes professional consultation and supervision, in order to explore issues relating to power, and the potential of exploitation or harm to the former client.

Northside Staff will not provide services to individuals with whom they have had a prior sexual relationship, as there is potential for the individual to be harmed and it is unlikely appropriate professional boundaries will be maintained.

Intentional breaches of professional boundaries will be managed in line with existing Northside procedures to ensure the safety of staff, clients, their carers and/or families.

4. Procedure

Northside Community Service staff visit clients at home only on work related business which is agreed by the team and documented in the electronic case file. Requests by clients and families for staff to visit at home outside of these arrangements should be declined by staff, documented in the electronic case file and discussed with their Manager.

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Staff are required to disclose any personal relationship, conflict or association that may impact their ability to perform their role on the basis of professional boundary challenges, to their Manager. If this is not possible or the preferred option, staff should raise their concern with Northside Human Resources for assistance and next steps.

Staff are required to declare to their manager if there is a pre-existing social relationship (acquaintance, friend, relative connection etc.) with a client or their family. The Manager will manage any declaration sensitively, maintain confidentiality at all times and only inform others on a need to know basis.

Support to staff, including the potential to extract staff from situations or instances where professional boundaries may be challenged, can be enabled through 1-1 discussion between a manager and the staff member concerned. Strategies to support staff to feel safe to perform their role may need to be developed, subject to the circumstances.

Staff are required to disclose any improper relationship between a colleague and client and report this directly to their Manager, or if this is not possible, to Senior Management.

5. Definitions

Client - Clients are individuals, families and other kinship arrangements, groups, communities, organisations and societies, especially those who are neglected, vulnerable, disadvantaged, alienated or have exceptional needs.

Dual Relationships - Dual or multiple relationships between social workers and clients can assume many forms. Issues can arise in relation to having social contact, exchanging gifts, sharing meals, maintaining friendships, sharing personal details with clients, having business dealings with clients, and becoming involved with clients sexually

Sexualised Conduct - Includes all conduct of a sexual nature including: physical contact and verbal, non-verbal, written and electronic (i.e. via sms, email, social networking sites etc.) expressions. It also includes the creation of a sexualised atmosphere (e.g. "discussion of what a sexual or romantic relationship might be like between the professional and the client, a voyeuristic interest by the professional in the client's sex life", sexual suggestion or innuendo) (Disch 2001, p. 206)

Northside: Northside Community Service, including all Services operated by both Community Services and Children's Services.

Northside staff - paid and unpaid employees delivering services, programs and activities

6. Key Roles & Responsibilities

Management ensures processes and practices are in place to protect staff and individuals engaged in services and ensures an appropriate and timely response in relation to information or reporting which presents as a risk or breach of professional boundaries. Provides the resources to support staff and clients including staff development and supervision

Staff follow policies and procedures, participate in development opportunities, treat consumers with dignity and respect at all times, work to maintain an environment that is culturally safe, support consumers to make informed choices about their care and ensure the privacy and confidentiality of consumers

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7. Related Standards, Legislation and Documents

- Australian Community Workers Code of Ethics 2017
- National Standards for Mental Health Services
- National Standards for Disability Services
- National Quality Standards for Age Care
- Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 – amended in Privacy Amendment
- Children and Young People Act 2008
- Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011
- Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Regulation 2012
- Reportable Conduct Scheme.

8. Document Control & Version History

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Corporate/Community Services or Children’s Services:	Community Services

Version History

<i>Version No.</i>	<i>Date of effect</i>	<i>Brief Summary of Change</i>
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