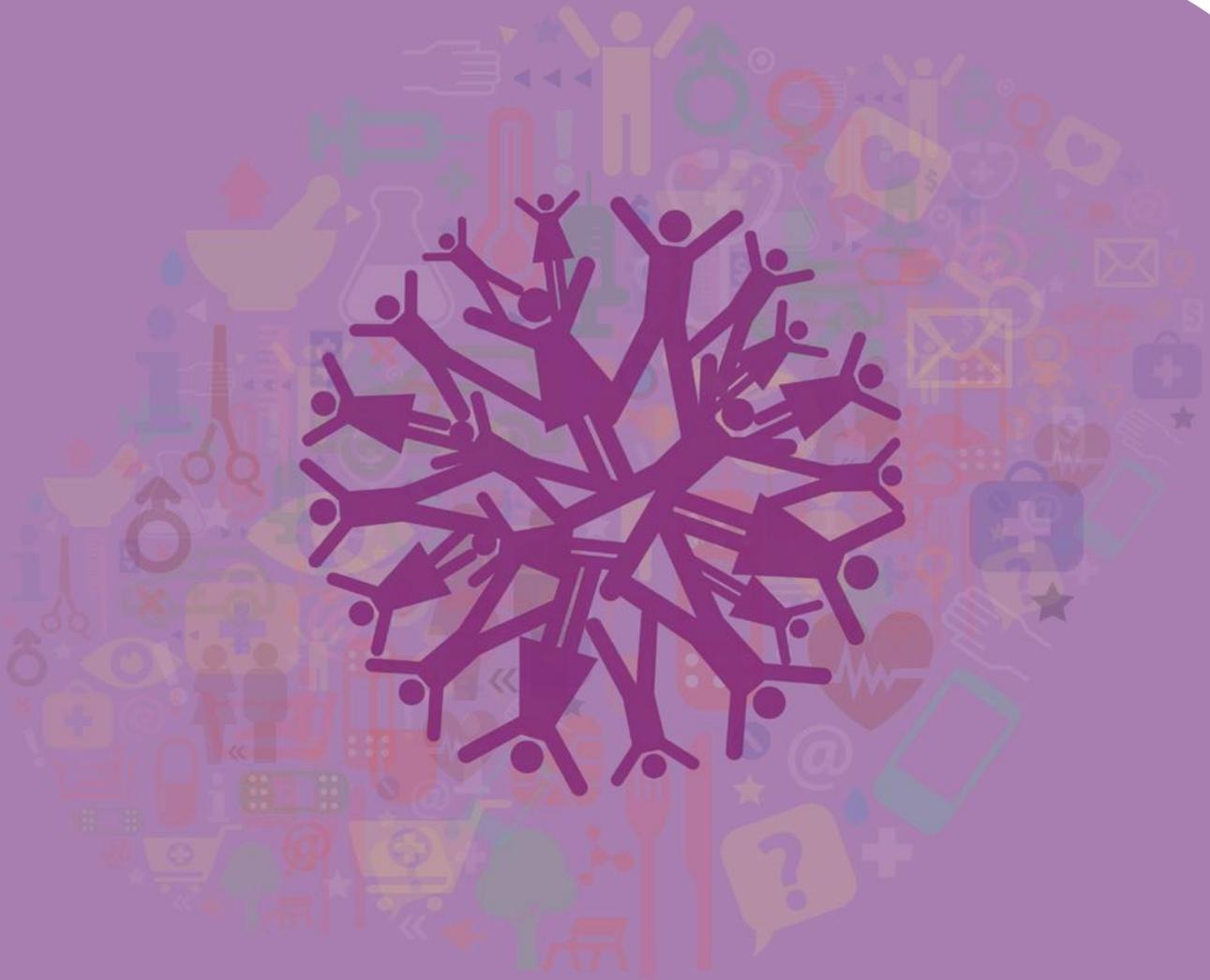


# CHCDEV002

## Analyse impacts of sociological factors on clients in community work and services

Release 2



*Learner guide*

CHCDEV002

# **Analyse impacts of sociological factors on clients in community work and services**

Release 2

**Learner guide**

Aspire Version 1.4



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Version	Release date	Modification
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Release 2, version 1.3	January 2019	Minor corrections as part of our continuous improvement program
Release 2, version 1.4	July 2020	Rewrite and restructure to improve conceptual integrity.

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# Contact details

## Participant

Name: .....

Start date: .....

Phone number: .....

Email: .....

## Work location

Name: .....

Address: .....

Postal address: .....

Workplace supervisor name: .....

Phone number: .....

Fax: .....

Email: .....

## Registered Training Organisation (RTO)

Name: .....

Address: .....

Postal address (if different): .....

Phone number: .....

Fax: .....

RTO contact name: .....

Mobile: .....

Email: .....



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## Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCDEV002 Analyse impacts of sociological factors on clients in community work and services*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: [www.training.gov.au](http://www.training.gov.au).

## How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which Practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

<b>Feature of the learner guide</b>	<b>How you can use each feature</b>
<b>Learning content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.</li> </ul>
<b>Examples and case studies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this Learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete Practice tasks, Learning checkpoints and the Final Assessment.</li> <li>▶ Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.</li> </ul>
<b>Practice tasks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which Practice tasks to complete.</li> </ul>
<b>Summary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.</li> </ul>
<b>Learning checkpoints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ There is a Learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which Learning Checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.</li> </ul>

## Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Understanding your job role, organisational procedures and legal responsibilities</li> <li>▶ Managing your work and seeing how well you are going and making goals for yourself at work</li> <li>▶ Seeking professional development opportunities for continuous improvement</li> </ul>
Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Understanding how documents are presented and being able to navigate through documents</li> <li>▶ Understanding industry- and job-specific terminology</li> <li>▶ Interpreting key information in relevant documents</li> <li>▶ Understanding routine workplace checklists and documentation</li> </ul>
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Planning, drafting and writing reports and documents</li> <li>▶ Communicating through written letters, email and online</li> <li>▶ Recording progress; reporting incidents</li> </ul>
Oral communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Clarifying instructions</li> <li>▶ Providing information</li> <li>▶ Supporting others through encouragement, negotiation and conflict resolution</li> <li>▶ Using body language to model desired behaviour and responding to others' body language</li> </ul>
Numeracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Calculating costs, weights, measurements of height and distance</li> <li>▶ Interpreting measurements</li> </ul>
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Working well with other people by cooperating, collaborating, encouraging and building rapport</li> </ul>
Planning and organising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Planning your workload and commitments</li> <li>▶ Implementing tasks</li> <li>▶ Completing work on time</li> <li>▶ Knowing how to deal with hazards and risks</li> </ul>
Making decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Understanding and applying decision-making processes</li> <li>▶ Reviewing the impact of your decisions</li> </ul>
Problem-solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Identifying problems</li> <li>▶ Working out how to fix a problem using problem-solving processes and reviewing the outcome</li> </ul>
Innovation and creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Recognising opportunities to develop and apply new ideas</li> <li>▶ Generating ideas by thinking of new ways to do something</li> <li>▶ Making suggestions to improve work</li> </ul>

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Technology and digital literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Efficiently using digitally based technologies and systems correctly and safely</li> <li>▶ Accessing, organising and presenting information</li> <li>▶ Using equipment correctly and safely</li> </ul>

## What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1: Identify social and cultural issues impacting on clients in Australian society	1A Identify major social and cultural institutions in Australian society	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1B How social and cultural institutions can affect clients	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1C Inequality and its effects on clients	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1D Long-term unemployment and its effects on clients	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	1E Ageing and its effects on clients	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
Topic 2: Analyse impacts of social and cultural factors on clients	2A Use available information to identify and analyse social and cultural factors	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2B Establish current health, wellbeing and associated needs	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	2C Make informed decisions about specific work to be undertaken	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3: Monitor impact of social and cultural factors on community work	3A Monitoring impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3B Conducting reviews	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident
	3C Making adjustments	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Basic understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Not confident



## Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 1A Identify major social and cultural institutions in Australian society**
- 1B Identify ways in which major institutions in Australian society can impact clients**
- 1C Examine and identify possible effects and consequences of conditions and experiences of inequality on clients**
- 1D Identify impacts of long-term unemployment and associated issues on clients**
- 1E Identify factors associated with age in Australian society and their impact on clients**

## Identify social and cultural issues impacting on clients in Australian society

*As a community service worker, you need to understand the social and cultural issues your clients face.*

Our gender, race and cultural background all shape our everyday experience of the world. So does the family we grow up in, along with other factors such as the place where we live, our age, our sexuality and our socioeconomic status (SES). These factors are known as 'social determinants', because they determine how fully we are able to participate in society as active, healthy citizens.

Understanding social roles and social norms, values and beliefs, aspects of culture, and the way society is arranged into a hierarchy is called stratification. Social stratification is the division of people into groupings based on social, cultural and economic backgrounds. Australian society has marginalised groups for whom equality of opportunity is difficult due to their social, cultural and economic backgrounds. A basic understanding of sociology – the study of how society works – will help you to identify these issues and work with clients to address them.

# 1A Identify major social and cultural institutions in Australian society

*Social and cultural institutions are well-established, widely accepted systems fundamental to the organisation and functioning of a society or culture, such as family, government and education.*

The primary function of institutions is to keep society running and promote stability. Institutions both observe and enforce social and cultural 'norms' or expectations, shaping the roles an individual plays. In the institution of the family, for example, grandparents, parents and children all play different roles, with different responsibilities and different relationships to each other.

Studying institutions means looking at how they function and the effect they have on individuals, groups and communities; how they influence our values and beliefs, the norms we observe and the roles we play. It means examining how these institutions meet our needs, or fail to; and how they seek to preserve, or sometimes to challenge, existing hierarchies and power structures.

## Examples of social and cultural institutions include:

- ▶ Family
- ▶ Government
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Work
- ▶ Healthcare
- ▶ Aged care
- ▶ Economy
- ▶ Law
- ▶ Media
- ▶ Religion

## Family

*The family is the oldest and most fundamental social institution.*

Historically, the family's main functions have been to regulate sexual relationships and reproduction; to nurture and socialise children; to support family members both socially and economically; and to pass culture from one generation to the next. In Australia, the state now takes on some of this responsibility, through the provision of education, income support and services such as aged care, but family is still the primary institution in most of our lives. It is from family that we learn our values, beliefs and attitudes, the social roles we play and the norms we observe; it is also from family that we derive a sense of our history and identity, of our place in the world.

When Australians talk about the ‘traditional family’, they are usually referring to a mother, a father and their children living together under the same roof, but the typical Australian family has changed significantly over the past half-century, starting with the introduction of no-fault divorce in the mid-1970s. Single-parent and blended families are now increasingly common, as are same-sex couples with children. Multigenerational households, in which parents and their children live with grandparents, are also on the rise: one in five Australians now lives with extended family in such an arrangement (Liu, 2020).

The structure of the family varies across cultures, as do family dynamics. As a community worker, you need to be aware of the role of family in the communities you serve, so that you can understand your clients’ needs and respond to them effectively and appropriately.

<b>Different types of families and households in Australia</b>	
▶ Nuclear families	▶ Two parents (of the opposite sex or same sex) and their children
▶ ‘Traditional’ families	▶ Two parents of the opposite sex and their children
▶ Single-parent families	▶ A single parent and their children
▶ Blended families	▶ Parents, step-parents and their children
▶ Extended families	▶ Parents, their children and immediate relatives, such as grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins
▶ Grandparent-led families	▶ A grandparent or grandparents and their grandchildren
▶ Couples without children	▶ A married or de facto couple living together
▶ Single-person households	▶ An individual living alone

## Government

*Australia has three levels of government – federal, state/territory and local – each with different responsibilities.*

The typical role of modern government is to preserve and protect society from external and internal threats, to promote support for a society’s values among its citizens, to regulate the economy, to oversee the negotiation and resolution of conflicts and to maintain order.

Community workers are employed at every level of government; others come into contact with government agencies regularly in the course of their work.

The federal government is also known as the Commonwealth government. Its responsibilities include social services, pensions and immigration. The federal government is also involved in some areas that are otherwise the responsibility of the states, including education and healthcare. The federal government funds its services through personal income tax, company taxes and the goods and services tax (GST), along with other sources of revenue such as customs duties.

State government responsibilities include community services, schools, hospitals, and police, prisons and emergency services. State and territory governments are funded mainly by the federal government. They also levy their own taxes, such as payroll and land tax, and charge stamp duty on sales of land.

At the local government level, city, municipality and shire councils are responsible for services and facilities such as community and public health centres, preschools and kindergartens, parks and playgrounds, libraries and programs such as Meals on Wheels. Local councils are partly funded by rates paid by local landowners and businesses, but they also rely on state and federal funding.

## Education

*The role of the education system is to ensure all children have access to a quality education, no matter what their family's circumstances are or how far they live from the nearest school.*

Formal schooling is compulsory in Australia from the ages of six to sixteen. Education prepares children for adult life, teaching them not just literacy, numeracy and other skills they will need to contribute to society, but also behaviours, attitudes and values.

### Primary and secondary education

Australia has a national 'Foundation to Year 10' curriculum that sets out what students should learn. It is up to state authorities to determine how the curriculum is delivered in schools in their state.

Primary school (foundation/kindergarten/prep to year 6) and secondary school (years 7 to 12) are free to all through the public school system; parents can, however, choose to send their children to private schools that charge tuition fees. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, Schools, 2019), about 65 per cent of Australian students attend public schools, 20 per cent attend Catholic schools and most of the remaining 15 per cent attend independent schools. A small minority – around 20,000 students – are homeschooled (English, 2019). Primary and secondary schools are jointly funded by the federal, state and territory governments. The states and territories provide the majority of public funding for government schools, while the federal government provides the majority of public funding for non-government schools.

Many community service workers are employed within primary and secondary schools as aides, helping to support both students and teachers. Others come into contact with the school system through their work in areas such as family services or child protection.

## **Tertiary education**

Tertiary education in Australia is optional and is paid for by the student, though loans are available from the federal government to cover the cost of tuition. These loans are repaid through regular deductions from an individual's pay when they enter the workforce, starting when their income reaches a certain threshold and continuing as long as they are earning at that level or above it.

Technical and further education or TAFE institutions offer vocational courses funded by state governments. Vocational education and training (VET) is also available through private colleges. The TAFE system receives the majority of its funding from state governments, while universities receive the majority of their funding from the federal government.

Universities are funded by the federal government and traditionally offer academic courses, though the number of vocational courses they offer is increasing.

## **Work**

*Work helps to provide a sense of purpose and direction for society; it also increases a person's access to opportunity.*

When we meet someone new, one of the first questions we ask is 'What do you do?' This illustrates the central role work plays in our society. Work's primary function is to help us support ourselves, our families and our communities: it gives us access to housing, education, healthcare and other essential services. It can also promote social connection, offer personal fulfilment and a sense of self-worth, and confer social status and position.

## **Paid and unpaid work**

Paid work is work that is done in exchange for a wage or salary. Unpaid work includes raising children; tasks necessary to the functioning of a household, such as cooking and cleaning; and volunteer work done in the community. Both paid and unpaid work are vital to our economy, though the contribution of unpaid workers is often overlooked. In 2017, economic consultants at PricewaterhouseCoopers calculated that the Australian economy is actually a third bigger than official estimates when the contribution of unpaid workers is taken into account; they also found that unpaid childcare is Australia's largest industry (PWC, 2017).

## **The labour market and employment rates**

The labour market is what we call workers competing for jobs and employers competing for workers. Employment rates indicate the strength of this market. In Australia, employment rates vary between states, regions and local areas. The employment rate is higher in cities than it is in rural areas, where there are fewer jobs. Even when work is available, regional and remote communities may have trouble attracting and retaining workers, due to the relative lack of amenities outside of major towns. This sometimes means employers in these areas have to offer better pay or conditions to find potential candidates with the necessary qualifications.

## Unemployment

Unemployment is often stigmatised in Australian society, assumed to be an individual failure or fault rather than recognised as a result of structural and economic factors. Being unemployed can be a significant barrier to a satisfactory quality of life and full participation in society, particularly for those who are unemployed over the long term. Community workers can help clients experiencing unemployment to secure the support they need, such as unemployment benefits and rent assistance, and to access training, apply for jobs and prepare to join or return to the paid workforce.

## Healthcare

*The role of the healthcare system in Australia is to provide comprehensive healthcare of a high standard to everyone in the community, regardless of their socioeconomic circumstances.*

A well-run and well-funded healthcare system helps a society to function by keeping people healthy, so that they can look after themselves and their families and participate in the labour force.

Australia has a universal healthcare system known as Medicare, which is subsidised by the federal government. Medicare makes free or heavily subsidised healthcare available to all Australian citizens and permanent residents. The federal government also subsidises certain medications via the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), making them more affordable.

State governments fund public hospitals, but Australia also has a private health sector and hospital system. The federal government encourages membership of private health funds through rebates that help to cover the cost of premiums.

Community service workers are often employed in the healthcare system or work closely with healthcare professionals to provide services to their clients.

## The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion

Australia is a signatory to the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (WHO, *Ottawa Charter*), which informs much of our public health policy.

According to this charter, your role as a community worker is to:

- ▶ be an advocate for health
- ▶ enable equitable access to healthcare
- ▶ mediate between clients, agencies and authorities to coordinate appropriate action.

The charter acknowledges that good policy isn't enough; it also has to be implemented well. For community workers, this means:

- ▶ creating supportive environments in which people can take control of their own care and help to care for others
- ▶ strengthening community action by empowering communities to set priorities, make decisions and plan and implement strategies to achieve better health
- ▶ helping clients to develop the personal skills they need for each stage of their lives by providing them with information, resources and support
- ▶ 'reorienting' health services to focus on the whole person and their needs rather than focusing exclusively on illness or injury.

## Aged care

*The function of the aged-care system in Australia is to ensure that older people, one of the most vulnerable groups in society, have their basic human needs met in a caring and supportive environment, whether in their own homes or in residential facilities.*

Contemporary approaches to aged care focus on supporting older people to remain in their own homes for as long as possible, with residential care seen as a last resort. The Commonwealth Home Support Program (CHSP) is available to people aged 65 and over, and Indigenous people aged 50 and over, who wish to live independently at home but need support to do so. The level of support provided depends on the individual's need. Those requiring the highest levels of care may need the help of a support worker to do everyday activities such as getting in and out of bed, moving about, going to the toilet, showering, getting dressed, and preparing and eating meals.

Residential aged-care facilities or nursing homes cater for older people who need respite care or can no longer live independently. Aged-care services also include help with healthcare, transportation and the provision of equipment such as walking frames, safety rails and ramps.

Some services are means-tested and clients may be required to contribute financially towards the care they receive. Some argue that having private user-pays facilities for the affluent as well as publicly funded facilities for the less affluent is in effect a two-tier system, contributing to the increasing stratification of Australian society.

### Legislation governing aged-care service provision

- ▶ *Aged Care Act 1997 (Cth)*
- ▶ *Aged Care (Accommodation Payment Security) Act 2006 (Cth)*
- ▶ *Aged Care (Accommodation Payment Security) Levy Act 2006 (Cth)*
- ▶ *Australian Aged Care Quality Agency Act 2013 (Cth)*
- ▶ *Australian Aged Care Quality Agency (Transitional Provisions) Act 2013 (Cth)*

## Economy

*In Australia, we have what is known as a 'mixed' economy, combining elements of both a capitalist market economy with aspects of centralised planning.*

The means of production and distribution are generally privately owned, and the market is driven by supply and demand: the government doesn't decide what Australian businesses should produce or dictate prices. The government does, however, act as a regulator – for example, by setting minimum conditions for workers – and it often uses policy as a lever to maintain stability or encourage change.

The function of a mixed economy is to provide workers with employment and income, consumers with goods and services, businesses with profit and government with revenue. Government uses a portion of that revenue to provide a social safety net, in the form of welfare, for those whose needs are not supplied by the market.

For example, most housing in Australia is built by owner-occupiers or developers, not by the government. The housing must, however, be built in accordance with the relevant planning and work health and safety regulations. Private investors may buy a property and rent it out; they too must follow the relevant laws in their dealings with tenants. The government makes little direct investment in the supply of housing stock, but it does fund schemes such as first home owner grants to encourage individuals to build or buy homes, making the construction and property markets stronger. It also provides limited public housing for people unable to participate in the private housing or rental markets.

## Law

*Law enforcement and the courts are important branches of the Australian justice system.*

Many community service jobs will bring you into contact with entities connected to the law, so you need to know how they work. You also need to know about legal aid and community legal centres and what they offer, so you can refer clients to them when they need legal advice or support.

### Law enforcement

Law enforcement in Australia is the responsibility of police and certain government agencies. The role of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) is to investigate federal crimes and liaise with law enforcement agencies in other countries. The state police are responsible for investigating crime at the state and local level, as well as general law and order. Other agencies with responsibility for law enforcement, such as the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and the Australian Border Force (ABF), have limited jurisdiction and powers. For example, the ABF is responsible for enforcing customs and immigration law, and only has the power to arrest and detain people in specific circumstances.

Community service workers often interact with law enforcement agencies and sometimes work alongside them. For example, community workers often liaise with police when dealing with situations involving domestic violence or child protection.

### The courts

Each state and territory has its own laws and court system. These court systems may include a local or magistrates court; a district or county court; specialist courts, such as children's or coroner's courts; and a supreme court. Particularly serious or complex cases are dealt with in a state's supreme court, or in a federal court, such as the Federal Circuit Court or the Family Court. The High Court of Australia is our highest court, and the final court of appeal in any civil or criminal matter.

### Legal aid

Each state and territory has its own legal aid organisation funded by the government. Their services are free. Anyone can go to legal aid for information, basic advice and referrals. Some legal aid organisations also have duty lawyers based at specific courts.

If a person cannot afford representation, they may be eligible for a grant of legal aid, which means they will be provided with a lawyer. Grants of legal aid are available for family law, criminal law and some civil law cases, but they are subject to certain conditions, including means-testing.

## Community legal centres

Community legal centres offer free or low-cost legal assistance in cases where a person cannot afford representation and legal aid cannot help. These services are often in high demand, and they give priority to those with the greatest needs. If they are unable to help a client, they may still be able to refer them to someone who can. Some community legal centres specialise in helping particular communities, such as Indigenous people, seniors, or refugees and asylum seekers.

## Media

*The media's primary functions are to inform and to entertain.*

Traditional forms of media include television, radio and print publications such as newspapers and magazines, but many Australians, particularly adolescents and younger adults, now get much of their information and entertainment online, via the internet, streaming services and social media.

The media has the power to influence individual behaviour, raise awareness of issues, shape public opinion and promote or challenge social and cultural norms. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter also provide a forum for social connection, communication and interaction.

Australia has a national broadcaster, the ABC, which is funded by the government. Other media channels are privately owned. A bill passed in 2017 amended national cross-media ownership restrictions, making it possible for a single company to own newspaper, radio and television licences in the same city, and for television broadcasters to reach more than 75 per cent of the population, giving already powerful media companies an even more powerful voice.

## Religion

*Many Australians find meaning, purpose, comfort or community in religion: it can help to promote social cohesion through shared rituals and beliefs, and also serves as a form of social control, prescribing and enforcing moral and behavioural norms.*

Australia is a secular society: our constitution forbids the establishment of an official state religion and compulsory religious observance. However, the constitution also guarantees the right to 'the free exercise of any religion', and the separation of government and religion is not absolute, as it is in some other countries. The federal government provides funding to schools run by religious organisations, for example, and to community services administered by faith-based charities such as Mission Australia and the Salvation Army.

According to the ABS, 14 million Australians, or about two-thirds of the population, claimed a specific religious affiliation or spiritual belief in the 2016 government census (ABS, World Religion, 2018). Around 12 million of those people identify as Christian. Nearly half of all Christians are Catholic, and a quarter are Anglican. Other prominent religions include Islam (600,000 people), Buddhism (560,000), Hinduism (440,000), Sikhism (130,000) and Judaism (90,000). About 7 million people, or a third of all Australians, indicated in the 2016 census that they had no religion or identified as atheists or agnostics.

# Practice task 1

Whether or not you are currently working in community services, as a member of the community you will have had contact with at least a few of the social institutions discussed in this topic.

Use this table to reflect and comment on your experience of these institutions. If you have not had contact with a particular institution, leave that line blank. You do not need to disclose any private or personal information that would make you uncomfortable.

Institution	Your reflection and comments
Education	Example: I attended my local public primary school and high school. I do volunteer work at my local community centre and have enrolled in this course to learn more about community services. I'm hoping that a formal qualification will help me find a full-time job as a community worker.
Work	
Healthcare	
Aged care	
Media	
Religion	

# 1B Identify ways in which major institutions in Australian society can impact clients

*The role of community services is to help clients negotiate the impact of broader social forces on their lives, offering support and access to the resources they need not just to survive but to live full, active, healthy lives.*

As a community service worker, you need to understand both the positive and negative impacts that social and cultural institutions can have on individuals, families and communities. The effects can be immediate and obvious – for example, when a new government policy is implemented that increases the amount a person receives from Centrelink every fortnight, making it easier for them to pay for essentials. The effects can also be more gradual, playing out over the course of an individual's entire life, and even the lives of subsequent generations. There is a clear and well-established connection, for example, between disadvantage in early childhood, poor outcomes in education and an individual's physical health in later life.

## Family as a social determinant

*Community service workers need to be aware of a client's family situation, including any history of family dysfunction or breakdown, in order to provide them with the appropriate support.*

Children who grow up in a stable, loving, supportive environment with positive role models have the best chance of doing well at school, finding secure, fulfilling work, enjoying good physical and mental health and participating fully in society. This is true whether they live with one parent or two, as part of a blended family or with extended family. It is also true whether their parents are de facto, married, separated or divorced, same-sex or opposite-sex.

Poverty, neglect, physical or emotional abuse and exposure to domestic violence are factors that contribute to disadvantage, diminishing or negating the social and emotional benefits that family would otherwise provide for children. Family breakdown can also cause trauma, particularly if it involves conflict or aggression or results in financial stress.

A family's socioeconomic status is in fact one of the strongest predictors of a child's educational achievement and health in adult life (Allen, 2020, pp. 53–56). The opportunities we receive depend on where we live and the resources and connections we can draw on. Disparities in opportunity are already apparent before children even start school. If these disparities are not identified and addressed, they are compounded over the course of an individual's life and can be passed on to their children. The effects of intergenerational welfare dependency are of particular concern: they can severely limit an individual's choices in life and represent a serious barrier to a more equitable society.

## Government and its social impact

*Government affects all of our lives through its legislative, policy and funding decisions.*

Some laws and policies are clearly intended to benefit and protect everyone in the community – such as work health and safety legislation designed to protect workers from accident and injury. It is sometimes the case, however, that new laws or policies benefit or protect one group in society while taking benefits or protections away from others – for example, laws banning smoking in public places, which limit smokers' rights in order to protect the health of the wider community. Whether we regard the impact of such changes as positive or negative depends to some extent on how the changes affect us personally. The same is true of changes to the allocation of government funds.

Some policy areas that directly affect community services and their clients include child protection, disability, domestic violence, education, employment, family, health, housing, immigration, Indigenous land rights, law and order, and social security. Funding cuts in any of these areas can have an impact on community service workers' ability to do their jobs, potentially affecting clients' lives. Increased funding, on the other hand, may make it possible to provide better services or to assist more people.

## The power of education

*There is a well-established relationship between an individual's educational attainment and positive outcomes in later life, such as higher-paying work, better health, longer life expectancy and greater social engagement.*

An individual's educational attainment also has a flow-on effect, benefitting their family, their community and society as a whole: higher levels of education in a community are associated with better public health, lower crime and increased social cohesion.

Therefore, access to education, and the quality of that education, helps to determine how equal a society is. A country's education system may actively promote social mobility, seeking to close the gap between the rich and the poor, but it can also reinforce existing power structures that benefit some groups while disadvantaging others.

## Inequities in the Australian education system

Government funding of private primary and secondary schools has historically been the subject of considerable controversy in Australia. Many believe that it has created a two-tier system, one for the wealthy and one for the less well off. There is a widespread perception that private schools outperform public schools academically, but analysis of the relevant data shows that public schools match or outperform private schools serving the same communities (Grattan, 2018), with significantly less funding per student (Zyngier, 2019). Despite this, private school students are more likely than public school students to attend university, and to experience lower levels of unemployment after graduation, even though former public school students outperform them academically at the tertiary level (Birch & Miller, 2007).

Government loans offered to university and TAFE students are designed to make it easier for all eligible students to participate in tertiary study, regardless of their personal and family circumstances. In reality, tuition fees still discourage low-SES students, and other groups such as mature-age and rural students, from enrolling in further education (NUS, 2013). These loans also amplify the economic disparity between men and women, as women earn less on average and are more likely to take breaks from full-time paid work to raise children or care for family members: their repayments therefore represent a higher proportion of their income, and it takes them longer to pay off their balance.

## Example

### The impact of early childhood education

Kofi is a one-year-old refugee child from Ghana. As part of the integration of his family into the community, he attends a community playgroup.

One of the support workers notices that Kofi's language development appears delayed. The support worker puts his mother, Efua, in contact with a community-based early childhood education centre designed for children with developmental delays.

At first, Efua is reluctant, but following a meeting with the centre staff, she enrolls her son. Efua finds that the other families attending the centre are a tremendous source of support for her and Kofi. Staff in the centre also help Efua to access other support services in the community, such as occupational and speech therapists.

Kofi is now meeting his developmental milestones, and Efua feels as though she has a community to turn to when she needs help.

## The impact of employment on workers' lives

*In Australian society, paid employment confers status and is highly valued: we associate it with qualities such as independence and autonomy.*

Employment has many benefits, including easier access to stable, high-quality accommodation and to education and training. It can also contribute to better health by making it easier to afford nutritious foods, preventative healthcare and recreational activities. Workers may take pride in their skills or the contribution they make to society through their work. Some find their job intellectually stimulating or emotionally satisfying. All of these things improve an individual's quality of life and the lives of their family and community.

Some jobs confer higher status and greater benefits than others, though, and for those in low-status jobs, work may be significantly less rewarding. Low-status work tends to be poorly paid, which can limit access to housing, education and good medical care; it may also be boring, repetitive or unpleasant. Workers who do such jobs are much less likely to find satisfaction in their work.

## How work affects our health

Work can also have a serious and damaging impact on our health and wellbeing. According to Safe Work Australia, more than 100,000 workers are seriously injured in Australian workplaces every year (SWA, *Statistics on Workers*, p. 3). The majority of workplace injuries involve musculoskeletal disorders caused by strain or overuse, but many are the result of accidents. Diseases caused by long-term exposure to dangerous materials are also a concern, and thought to be underrepresented in official figures (SWA, *Disease and Injury Statistics*).

Certain industries and occupations are more dangerous than others – machinery operators, technicians, tradespeople and labourers are much more likely to be killed at work than professionals and administrative workers, for example (SWA, *Fatality Statistics*) – but even well-paid, high-status professional jobs have health risks. High levels of stress and long working hours can lead to an unhealthy work–life balance, putting pressure on relationships with family and other social connections.

Stress, discrimination and bullying at work can also make us more susceptible to both physical and mental illnesses, including anxiety and depression, and to feelings of isolation or alienation.

## The impact of healthcare

*Public health initiatives and access to healthcare have an impact not just on our day-to-day wellbeing but also on our life expectancy.*

The average woman now lives to 85, and the average man to 81 (Allen, 2020, pp. 81–82). Those dramatic gains are largely the result of better maternal and infant healthcare, but society as a whole benefits both from preventative care that keeps us well and from treatment when we are sick or injured.

Examples of the positive impact that public health policy has on our individual wellbeing include educational campaigns such as that encouraging Australians to ‘slip, slop, slap’: the incidence of melanoma in younger Australians has fallen by almost a third since the early 1980s. Anti-smoking and anti-alcohol campaigns have also had a significant impact: the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reported in 2016 that the overall volume of alcohol consumed by Australians aged 15 and over had fallen to its lowest level in 50 years; in the same year, the National Drug Strategy Household Survey found that daily smoking rates had halved over the past 25 years, from 24 per cent to 12 per cent (AIHW, *Skin Cancers*, 2016; *Australia’s Health*, 2016, 2018).

## Inequities in Australian healthcare

In principle, every Australian citizen has equal access to healthcare; in practice, some have better access than others, and therefore receive better care.

People who live in towns or cities have more immediate access than those in rural and remote areas; some health services are simply not available outside major centres. Australians living in country and outback communities live shorter lives and experience higher levels of disease and injury than people in urban areas, due in part to their poorer access to medical care (AIHW, *Rural & Remote Health*, 2019). The effects are especially evident in Indigenous communities, in which both men and women have a life expectancy 9 years shorter than that of their non-Indigenous counterparts (Allen, 2020, p. 82).

People who can afford private health insurance also have easier access to some forms of healthcare than people relying on the public system, including home nursing, most psychological services, and physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy, which are not usually covered by Medicare. One of the most notable shortfalls of the Medicare system is the fact that it doesn’t cover dental care: more than 60,000 Australians are hospitalised every year due to preventable oral health conditions (Oral Health CRC, 2014). Public dental services are available in certain circumstances to people receiving government benefits, but the rules vary from state to state, and public patients sometimes have to wait up to a year or more to see a dentist (Health Direct, 2019). Those who have private health insurance have easy access to dental care; they can also bypass waiting lists for elective procedures in public hospitals by using the private system.

**Example**

**Promoting public health**

The success of public health education campaigns alone is limited. By providing the right environment and support, and focusing on the needs of the individual and their community, community service workers can play an important role in communicating a health message to its target audience and encouraging them to respond.

The following are examples of successful public health campaigns implemented in Australia.



**Anti-smoking 'quit' campaigns**

Policy objective

- ▶ To reduce the number of smokers by helping people to quit

Creating a supportive environment

- ▶ Banning smoking in public places, putting health warnings on packaging, providing telephone quit lines, supplying information in community languages

Strengthening community action

- ▶ Organising community-based quit-smoking groups and online forums

Developing personal skills

- ▶ Educating clients about the dangers of smoking and strategies for dealing with addiction

Reorienting health services

- ▶ Supporting smokers as they try to quit rather than shaming or blaming them



**Breast cancer screening**

Policy objective

- ▶ To detect breast cancer in time to treat it successfully

Creating a supportive environment

- ▶ Promoting self-examination, providing free screening to women over 50, supplying information in community languages

Strengthening community action

- ▶ Organising Pink Ribbon fundraisers or events for Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Developing personal skills

- ▶ Teaching clients how to self-check

Reorienting health services

- ▶ Arranging group travel and screenings for clients from regional and remote communities, providing mobile services

## The aged-care system

*Australia's population is ageing: the number of older people needing support is growing, but there are fewer young people to support them.*

Demand for aged-care services already outstrips supply and is steadily increasing; as a society, we need to find a way to respond to that demand. As always, it is clients and their needs that must be the focus of our response.

### Informal and home-based care

One possible result of the increasing demand for aged-care services is that families may continue to care for ageing relatives in their own homes past the point where it is appropriate to do so, or have them move in under the same roof. This would in turn lead to a greater reliance on community services, as most families are unlikely to have all of the skills and resources they need to cope with the many issues we face as we age, such as limited mobility or the onset of dementia.

As a community service worker, you must understand and be sensitive to:

- ▶ Many older clients' reluctance to give up their independence and be cared for by others
- ▶ A client's cultural background, and how it shapes their relationship with their family
- ▶ Conflict within families about the most appropriate way to provide care

You must also understand the stress a family is put under by caring for older relatives; the burden can be physical, mental, emotional and financial, and coping with it can be extremely difficult.

### Residential and respite care

The Department of Health estimates that in 2017–2018, nearly a quarter of a million Australians were living in permanent residential aged care, and more than 60,000 received residential respite care (DoH, 2020). These individuals were a minority – well over a million older people received home-based support in the same period – but those in residential care are still a significant group, and we need a system that is able to cater for them.

With more Australians now remaining at home for longer, those who enter residential facilities tend to require more intense care. This unfortunately leaves some vulnerable to neglect and abuse. Failures of the aged-care system have been well publicised in recent years, and in 2017, after particularly disturbing details of the treatment of residents at a South Australian nursing home were revealed, a review of the sector was conducted. This review led to the closure of several facilities and eventually, in September 2018, to the establishment of a royal commission.

An interim report released by the commissioners in October 2019 expressed shock at the substandard care provided in many nursing homes and made specific criticism of the overreliance on 'chemical restraint' or sedation of residents. The commissioners also commented on the staff in these facilities, noting that they were 'underpaid, undervalued and insufficiently trained' and had failed to keep residents safe as a result. This highlights the importance of training for community workers, and also your importance, as an individual, to the quality of care your clients receive. The commission's final report, due in November 2020, is expected to recommend significant reforms.

## Economic policy and its social impact

*While market economies have many advantages, such as rewarding talent and innovation and providing consumers with greater choice, they can also have disadvantages.*

In a capitalist society, those with capital – money or property – tend to do better than those without. The wealthy are more likely to safeguard their existing wealth and add to it, whereas those without capital need to sell their labour in exchange for wages. In an unfettered free market, this can lead to a growing gap between rich and poor, less favourable work conditions and destruction of the natural environment.

Though Australia's market operates on capitalist principles, the government acts as a check against some of the less than desirable outcomes a truly free market might produce. The economy nevertheless has a direct impact on the lives of working people and society as a whole. In times of prosperity, the labour market is strong and employment rates are high. Employers have to compete for workers, so wages and conditions are better. In less buoyant times, there are fewer jobs. Workers have to compete with each other for employment and are not as likely to risk negotiating for higher pay and conditions. Higher unemployment also means less spending, which can lead to further job losses as businesses start to struggle. The slowing of the economy can eventually lead to a downturn or even a depression.

Many social and community services in Australia exist to mitigate the negative effects specific groups experience in society. Their role is to redress imbalances and inequities by providing support and resources to individuals and communities who are excluded from or face barriers to full participation in the market.

## Policing and justice

*Australia's legal system is a common law system; this means case decisions are made in the courts and legislation is determined by parliament.*

The law theoretically treats everyone equally, but the reality is that some individuals are subject to much higher levels of policing than others. The impact of law enforcement on an individual's life is determined to some extent by their personal characteristics: the police intervene far more frequently in Indigenous communities than they do in other Australian communities. The same is true for homeless people and those with mental illnesses. Members of social groups subject to over-policing are more likely to have dealings with the courts, and therefore to be fined or sentenced, than other Australians. As a result, they may feel very differently about the justice system than people who have limited contact with it. Support workers need to learn about a community's relationship with law enforcement in order to provide their clients with effective support in their dealings with the police, the courts and the corrections system.

Access to legal representation is another area in which significant disparities exist; it is an individual's socioeconomic status that determines who will represent them if they face court. Legal aid services have limited resources, which means that representation by a legal aid lawyer tends to be reserved for criminal and family law cases.

## Media's influence on society

*One of the functions of media is socialisation – shaping how we think and behave – which means that what we see, hear and absorb from the media is important.*

Young people today are exposed to norms, values, attitudes and beliefs from other societies and cultures, often very different to their own; this can have benefits, but it can also have disadvantages. In some communities, such outside influences may be perceived negatively, as a disruption of existing cultural norms and practices.

The media has always played a part in raising awareness of social issues and driving public opinion. This role can be used to achieve positive outcomes, such as influencing policymakers to increase funding to education and healthcare, or it can be used to sow discord and divide the community by reinforcing inaccurate perceptions and stereotypes.

Since the recent changes to media licensing laws, there is growing concern in Australia about a lack of diversity in the range of views audiences are exposed to, particularly in the presentation of news and current affairs. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter pose similar concerns: their algorithms amplify some voices while silencing others, curating what we read so that we are rarely challenged by opinions conflicting with our own. These platforms are not bound by traditional publishing norms that mandate such practices as rigorous fact-checking, and their global nature makes it difficult for national regulatory authorities to hold them accountable.

Finally, while the media has the power to entertain, inform and create genuine social connections, it can also expose us to inappropriate, frightening or violent content. Television and newspapers contain graphic photographs of murder scenes, car accidents and acts of terrorism; the internet offers access to hate sites and revenge pornography; while social media platforms host 'pro-ana' sites promoting anorexia and act as a vehicle for bullying. Over time, we may become desensitised to confronting material, gradually shifting social and cultural norms almost without our awareness.

## Religious institutions

*Like most other social institutions, religion can have both positive and negative impacts on our lives.*

In some circumstances, religion can be a unifying force, bringing a community together to worship, creating a sense of belonging and strengthening social connections. In other circumstances, it can cause conflict. Historically, divisions between Protestant and Catholic Christians were a source of tension in Australian society.

## Community work

Despite the official separation of 'church and state', Christian churches are the largest provider of welfare after the government, which increasingly relies on organisations such as St Vincent de Paul, Anglicare and the Salvation Army to deliver government-funded social services. Christian organisations have long sought to influence social policy in Australia, particularly in the areas of education, health and social welfare. They are often a driving force behind progressive social projects more generally – endorsing reconciliation, for example, and taking a prominent part in National Sorry Day. Many churches also run community programs such as food banks and soup vans.

Other religious organisations, such as Sikh temples and Hare Krishna centres, also play an important role in feeding vulnerable members of the community, including the homeless and others living below the poverty line.

As a community service worker, you may work for a faith-based organisation or refer clients to them. It is important to understand that the organisation's faith is irrelevant to the provision of government-funded services, as is the client's faith, or lack of faith. Your own religious beliefs are also irrelevant, in a professional setting. Your beliefs may motivate you to do the kind of work you do, but your job is to support your client regardless of their beliefs and whether or not they accord with your own.

## Historical abuse

Many community services and programs run by religious institutions have been implicated in the abuse of children and others in their care. The nature and scale of the crimes uncovered by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse irretrievably damaged the reputation of religious institutions in the eyes of many Australians.

The royal commission's final report was published in December 2017. Among its recommendations was the provision of 'prevention education' for students taking VET courses to prepare them to work with children. As a community service worker, you have a duty to protect the children in your care from harm and to report concerning or inappropriate behaviour. The report, including a full list of the commissioners' recommendations, can be found at [aspirelr.link/royal-commission-child-abuse](https://aspirelr.link/royal-commission-child-abuse).

### Example

#### Planning assistance for the Jones family

Deliah works in a local community centre. Mrs Jones has come to see her to ask for advice. Deliah listens to Mrs Jones and asks questions to find out more about her situation, so she can provide appropriate assistance.

Mrs Jones tells her that she lives with her family in a rented four-bedroom house in a working-class suburb. Neither she nor her husband completed high school. They have five children, ranging in age from six months to 10 years. Mr Jones works as a builder's labourer. Until their youngest child was born, Mrs Jones had a part-time job in a local bakery, working from 3am to 9am. This allowed her to be home for most of the day. After Mr Jones left for work in the morning, the children were cared for by an elderly neighbour until Mrs Jones came home from the bakery. Mrs Jones is planning to return to her job when the baby is weaned in about six months' time. Her employer has promised to keep her job open for her, but small businesses in the area have been closing down. Mrs Jones also has concerns about her health: her blood pressure is high and she frequently becomes breathless and faint. She has also noticed a lump in her left breast recently but hasn't yet had it checked.

Mr Jones sometimes works away from home, leaving Mrs Jones to care for the children alone for several weeks, sometimes months, at a time. A recent downturn in the building trade has left him worried about his job, so he can't refuse these projects even though he'd like to.

Their eldest child, Sam, is struggling at school. Teachers have advised Mrs and Mr Jones to have him assessed by an educational psychologist, but there is a two-year waiting list to see a public practitioner, and the Joneses cannot afford to take Sam to a private practitioner. Sam has recently begun truanting and has twice been brought home by the police after being found with a group of older boys suspected of shoplifting.

## Example

Mr Jones has been finding his work and home life increasingly stressful, and last week he was arrested for public drunkenness and obscene language. He is on a personal bond to appear in the local magistrate's court next month. This is not his first offence and the Joneses are worried that he may be sentenced to a term of imprisonment, which would have a devastating effect on the family's finances and functioning. They cannot afford a lawyer and have not been able to access legal aid. If Mr Jones loses his job, the family will not be able to pay their rent, and there is currently a three-year wait for public housing in their area, longer for larger families.

After listening to Mrs Jones, Deliah makes notes under the headings *Work, School, Legal issues and Health*, detailing the effects and potential effects of each of these major social institutions on the family. These notes will help her plan how she can assist the Joneses.

### Work

The building trade is slowing down. If Mr Jones is laid off, the family may be unable to pay their rent. This may affect Mr Jones' self-esteem and strain family relationships. If he is unable to find a new job, the family may be evicted and have to stay with relatives or friends, which could disrupt the children's schooling if they have to move out of the area.

### School

NAPLAN test results indicate that Sam, the 10-year-old, is struggling with literacy and numeracy. His teachers have recommended assessment by an educational psychologist. Early intervention is essential for children with learning delays, but there is a long waiting list to see a public practitioner. Sam's difficulties at school may be affecting his self-esteem – he is perhaps seeking acceptance and belonging by truanting with older boys and may become involved in gang activity.

Sam's association with these boys, suspected of shoplifting, may bring him to the attention of local child welfare and child protection authorities. This could have consequences for the other children, if the authorities discover that they have regularly been left in the care of an untrained, unscreened elderly neighbour. Intervention with Sam may be beneficial. Checking the care arrangements for the younger children also may be beneficial, but it could upset Mrs Jones' working arrangements, which could lead to further loss of income, with consequences for the family's housing and their ability to pay for help for Sam.

### Legal issues

Mr Jones cannot afford a lawyer. He's working full time, though, so he may not be eligible for legal aid representation. He didn't finish high school and is unlikely to have the knowledge or skill to represent himself effectively in court. A custodial sentence would have devastating effect on the family. A fine would also be a severe financial burden, but it's the better option.

### Health

Mrs Jones' symptoms may indicate potentially serious health issues. Assessment, diagnosis and treatment will be covered by Medicare, but she may need to cover some out-of-pocket expenses. If her condition proves serious – perhaps serious enough to warrant hospitalisation – this will place an extra burden on the family. Mr Jones may have to take time away from his work to care for the children, which would again mean loss of income and all its potential consequences.

# Practice task 2

Read the case study and answer the questions.

## Case study

Andrew is a youth worker with a not-for-profit organisation that acts as a referral agency for young people in crisis. Andrew is young, enthusiastic and keen to impress his fellow workers and help young people. He comes across an article in a professional journal about a program offered to disengaged youth in Germany, and the success it has had in helping young people to engage with their local communities.

Without discussing this with his supervisor, Andrew introduces aspects of the program into his day-to-day work with young people. After six months he is frustrated because he does not seem to be getting any positive results.

1. Why might Andrew's new strategies not be working?

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2. What does Andrew need to do to improve his program? What information does he need, and how can he find it?

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# 1C Examine and identify possible effects and consequences of conditions and experiences of inequality on clients

While Australia has traditionally been recognised as an egalitarian society, disparities between the rich and the poor have been growing over the past half-century. Inequality isn't just the result of disparities in wealth, though; it can also be the result of discrimination, both at the personal and systemic levels. An individual's race, gender, sexuality and other social determinants such as employment status and age all influence how fully they are able to participate in society. Disadvantage is sometimes described as 'intersectional', meaning that these different factors all intersect; for example, a person might experience discrimination due to both their cultural background and the area in which they live.

There are many marginalised populations in Australian society, including women; Indigenous people; immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers; and lesbian, gay, transgender and intersex people. The objective of social and community services is to work with these people to address the inequality they experience both as individuals and as part of a family and community.

## The effects and consequences of inequality can include:

- ▶ Diminished quality of life
- ▶ Domestic violence
- ▶ Family breakdown
- ▶ Social isolation
- ▶ Homelessness

## Racism

Many Australians think of racism as language or behaviour that openly and deliberately discriminates against people of another race, but it has many other forms. 'Systemic racism' is racism that underpins social and cultural institutions, privileging some groups while disadvantaging others.

Systemic racism may be conscious or unconscious, deliberate or inadvertent, and many people who benefit from it are unaware of it. These people may think that the privilege they enjoy is earned – entirely a result of their own efforts – and fail to understand that other people have not been given the same resources and opportunities that they have been given, erroneously assuming that Australian society is a 'level playing field'. Many people look at disadvantaged communities and blame them for the disadvantage they experience, not seeing that it is the product of broader social forces.

Racism can limit an individual's or community's engagement with the education system, putting them at a disadvantage both socially and economically by limiting their later access to employment. Cultural and language differences can also be a barrier to full participation in education and employment, and to access to healthcare and other essential services. This is true both for Indigenous communities and immigrant communities.

Australian society was founded on the dispossession of Indigenous people, and our social and cultural institutions reflect that, privileging non-Indigenous culture over Indigenous cultures. The promotion of a 'white Australia' was, for a long time, official policy, the goal of which was to assimilate Indigenous people into white society and prevent immigration from non-white countries. Though the White Australia policy was formally renounced in 1973 in favour of multiculturalism, the inequities built into our system from the outset persist, and are being dismantled only very slowly and gradually.

As a community worker, you need to:

- ▶ Understand the different forms of racism and their effects on marginalised groups, including Indigenous people, immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers
- ▶ Learn about the cultures of the communities you serve, so you can provide appropriate support
- ▶ Recognise and be sensitive to the effects of trauma, isolation and social rejection on individuals, families and communities

## Sexism and gender inequality

Thanks in large part to the efforts of the feminist movement, we now take for granted a woman's right to vote, to own property, to continue in paid employment after marriage and, theoretically at least, to receive equal pay for equal work. But despite this progress, and despite the fact that they are half of the population, women remain a marginalised group. Overtly sexist language and behaviour are increasingly considered unacceptable in mainstream society, but the powerful effects of systemic gender inequality persist.

Though women's participation in paid work has increased, they still do significantly more domestic work than men – regardless of the number of paid hours they do. This disparity becomes even more pronounced when a heterosexual couple have children: in most families, the mother's hours in the paid workforce decrease, while the father's hours remain the same. For many women, time spent out of the workforce can result in a loss of confidence, professional connections and skills. It also means less time to contribute to superannuation, ensuring that women retire with less than men.

Inequalities in the workplace persist too, despite the passage of legislation such as the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) and the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (Cth). The Workplace Gender Equality Agency reported in February 2020 that, on average, Australian women earned \$242.90 less than men per week (WGEA, *Pay Gap*, 2020). The 'glass ceiling' – the invisible barrier that stops women rising to management positions, regardless of their qualifications or achievements – is still firmly in place as well. If current trends continue, women are still 20 years away from equal representation in full-time management positions and 80 years away from having an equal chance of being promoted to CEO (WGEA, *Women in Leadership*, 2020).

These sorts of systemic inequalities can be seen in other social institutions too, including education and healthcare. For example, the reproductive health needs of women in rural communities are often accorded low priority, forcing them to travel long distances for prenatal care and to give birth.

Some of the main objectives of feminist social policy are to ensure that:

- ▶ Women and men have equal status, opportunity and access to resources and services
- ▶ Families have access to affordable, high-quality childcare
- ▶ The social roles women play are recognised and their contribution is valued

Feminism as a social movement has often been criticised for prioritising the voices and experiences of privileged white women. Community service workers need to be aware of this; even if you are a woman, you can't assume that other women's experience of sexism and gender inequality is the same as yours. You need to be ready to listen and respond to the voices of women whose experiences you do not share.

## Homophobia and transphobia

LGBTQI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning) and intersex. It is sometimes followed by an 'A', for asexual, and/or a plus sign (+) to represent all minority gender identities and sexual orientations.

Historically, homosexuality was regarded as 'deviant' behaviour or mental illness in Australian society; the Australian Medical Association (AMA) didn't remove same-sex attraction from its official list of illnesses and disorders until 1984. LGBTQI people were frequently subject to discrimination, harassment and violence, and many therefore kept their sexuality a secret or sought treatment for it. Others were forced to undergo treatment against their will.

The LGBTQI community has been denied many of the rights taken for granted by other Australians. For example, sex between consenting adult men was illegal in every state until 1975, when South Australia was the first state to change its laws; and it remained illegal in Tasmania until 1997. The federal government passed the *Human Rights (Sexual Conduct) Act* in 1994; other laws have been passed since then, at both the federal and state level, granting same-sex couples various rights that other Australians already enjoyed, such as the right to adopt, to access family benefits, and to conceive a child using IVF technology.

The passage of marriage equality legislation in federal parliament in 2017 is often seen as the culmination of the LGBTQI community's fight for equal rights, but there are many other forms of legal inequality yet to be addressed. For example, religious schools are still permitted to discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students and staff; and there is no federal law prohibiting vilification on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status. 'Conversion therapy' – which includes a range of different treatments such as aversion therapy, psychotherapy and hypnotherapy – is still legal in Australia too, though many regard efforts to suppress a person's gender identity or sexual orientation as a form of torture, and the ACT, Queensland and Victoria are considering banning it.

LGBTQI people in Australia still experience discrimination in many parts of everyday life, including education and employment, and when accessing healthcare and other services. Community workers need to be aware of issues facing the LGBTQI community due to the harassment and hostility they experience, including higher than average rates of unsafe alcohol and drug use, mental illnesses, self-harm and suicide.

**Example**

**Homophobia in the workplace**

Tod has worked for three years at a charitable organisation run by a church. He receives great satisfaction from his job. Tod has been in a same-sex relationship for six years. If asked about his sexuality, he does not hide it, but he does not openly discuss it, either. He has a few close work colleagues with whom he and his partner socialise.

One morning, Tod opens the organisation’s intranet home page to discover a biblical quote that portrays homosexuality in a negative light. Tod requests a meeting with management to ask that it be removed. Several of his work colleagues attend the meeting in support.

At the meeting, Tod is told that his ‘gay agenda’ has no place in a Christian organisation. Afterwards, his supervisor and some colleagues begin to treat him differently. He is also rostered on at times that he has previously indicated he cannot work, and his professionalism is questioned over small matters.

Unhappy at this bullying and harassment, Tod resigns. He loses his income and contact with his work friends and starts to become increasingly socially isolated. When he and his partner break up, he experiences a severe depression.

**Diminished quality of life**

‘Quality of life’ is a term used to describe a person or community’s general level of wellbeing, comfort and happiness. Anything that takes away from your health and happiness diminishes your quality of life. Diminished quality of life can have multiple causes: it may be caused by disability, for example, but the discrimination a person faces due to that disability might actually be a more significant factor.

Disadvantage is one of the most common reasons an individual might experience diminished quality of life. It takes many forms, such as poverty, poor housing, low literacy and physical and mental illnesses, most of which can have serious consequences, including substance abuse, self-harm and suicide attempts.

Example	<b>Factors leading to diminished quality of life</b>	
	<b>Poverty</b>	<p>Poverty can significantly diminish the quality of life of an entire community as a result of issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Poor housing</li> <li>▶ Poor nutrition</li> <li>▶ Poor health</li> <li>▶ Discrimination</li> <li>▶ Over-policing</li> <li>▶ Over-representation in the juvenile and criminal justice systems</li> </ul>
	<b>Mental illness</b>	<p>Mental illnesses, such as depression, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia, can affect every part of a person’s life, including their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Day-to-day activities</li> <li>▶ Physical and emotional wellbeing</li> <li>▶ Ability to care for themselves and their physical environment</li> <li>▶ Personal relationships</li> <li>▶ Education</li> <li>▶ Working life</li> </ul>
	<b>Ageing</b>	<p>As we age, we experience many changes that can negatively affect our quality of life, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The death of spouses, siblings and friends</li> <li>▶ Physical impairment, such as loss of vision or hearing</li> <li>▶ Mental impairment, such as the onset of dementia</li> <li>▶ Loss of mobility</li> <li>▶ Loss of independence</li> <li>▶ Social isolation</li> </ul>

## Family breakdown

Socioeconomic inequality and other forms of disadvantage are a significant cause of stress not just on individuals but on families, too, and the pressure can often be too much. Many factors can contribute to family breakdown, including:

- ▶ Financial stress
- ▶ Domestic violence
- ▶ Parental dysfunction
- ▶ Unemployment
- ▶ Substance abuse

When dealing with family breakdown, it’s important to minimise distress for both children and parents, so that adjustment and recovery are easier for everyone. Adults will need advice about custody arrangements, housing, finances and mediation. The support you offer children will depend on their age and developmental stage.

Children experiencing parental separation may be confused, worried or sad and need to be given a chance to grieve for the loss of their family unit. They may also be frightened or angry. Some may blame themselves, or fear abandonment.

More than one in five Australian children will experience parental separation before they turn 18, and studies show that most eventually adjust well. The minority who experience long-term problems, such as serious mental illness, substance abuse and suicide attempts, tend to have witnessed severe conflict, such as frequent verbal or physical violence. These children are in need of extra support (Halford, 2018).

## Domestic violence

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare published a report in 2019 documenting domestic violence, also known as family violence, occurring across all age and sociodemographic groups in Australia. Though the general rate of violence in our society is falling, domestic violence has remained more or less stable over the past decade; the data shows that women and children are the main victims (AIHW, *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence*, 2019).

Domestic violence occurs across the economic spectrum, but rates are higher in poor areas than in wealthy ones. One of the main reasons for this is women's financial dependence on violent partners. Because they don't have the resources to leave, poorer women are more likely to be subject to ongoing abuse. They rely on police to intervene to stop violence in the short term, whereas women with access to financial resources may seek help from a lawyer to escape their abuser altogether. The problem is particularly pronounced in regional and rural areas, which are generally poorer than metropolitan areas and also more isolated. The lack of access to a car or public transport may make some women more vulnerable (Kerr, 2018).

For a complete overview of domestic violence in Australia, you can find the AIHW report at [aspirelr.link/aihw-domestic-violence-report](https://aspirelr.link/aihw-domestic-violence-report).

## Homelessness

The term 'homeless' doesn't just describe people who live on the streets; it also covers those who don't have their own home and have to stay with family or friends or in temporary accommodation. On census night in 2016, it's estimated that more than 116,000 people in Australia were homeless; around 21,000 of them were living in supported accommodation and 8,200 were sleeping rough (AIHW, *Homelessness*, 2019).

There are many reasons a person or family might become homeless, including domestic violence, family breakdown, economic hardship, gambling addiction, substance abuse and mental illness. It can be difficult to find employment when you are homeless, and even to claim support payments, because you have no fixed address, and because attending job interviews is a challenge when you have so few resources. Homeless people are among the most vulnerable in our society, and may have difficulty securing shelter and food, as well as clean water for drinking, bathing and washing their clothes.

Affordable housing provided through social welfare programs is in some cases the solution to homelessness, but homeless people often experience multiple forms of disadvantage and may require other forms of support too.

For more information about homelessness, you can find the most recent AIHW report at [aspirelr.link/report-homelessness-services](https://aspirelr.link/report-homelessness-services).

## Social isolation

When people don't have the social, emotional or financial resources they need to engage with the world, it can lead to isolation. Social isolation is different from loneliness in that it is ongoing. It is often involuntary, but it may also be a deliberate choice: some people have little or no contact with family and neighbours, and may deliberately minimise contact with others in everyday activities, such as shopping or attending work. Many stay indoors and have no contact with others for days or even weeks at a time. But whether we choose it or not, social isolation can be harmful: it is associated with poor sleep, cognitive decline, a weaker immune system, potential heart problems and even early death (Novotney, 2019).

There are many risk factors for social isolation, including:

- ▶ Living alone
- ▶ Old age
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Limited English-language skills
- ▶ Social phobias
- ▶ Homelessness

People who have a mental illness, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or eating disorders, are at a particularly high risk of social exclusion. Stigma and feelings of unease or discomfort often cause other people to shun or avoid people with mental illnesses, exacerbating other difficulties they experience.

Older people are also at much higher risk than younger people, and may experience especially acute feelings of isolation after the death of a spouse.

## Practice task 3

1. Identify three groups in Australian society likely to be affected by inequality.

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2. Choose one of these groups and list at least three possible effects of inequality and discrimination that they might experience.

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# 1D Long-term unemployment and its effects on clients

For most Australians, unemployment is a short-term experience. For example, young people may have difficulty finding work immediately after leaving high school or graduating from university, when they have little experience, but eventually they find work. For others, though, unemployment becomes a long-term prospect, with far-reaching consequences. It can be caused by a range of factors, including poor educational attainment, geographic isolation, disability, chronic illness and intergenerational socioeconomic disadvantage.

Long-term unemployment can have profound effects on an individual's health, on their family and on the community they live in.

## What is long-term unemployment?

The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines long-term unemployment as a period of unemployment lasting for more than a year. Before the Covid-19 pandemic began in early 2020, causing a sudden spike in unemployment, around one in four unemployed people in Australia was classified as having been unemployed long-term. The most common barriers to finding work included sickness or disability, lack of skills or education and too few job vacancies.

## The impact of long-term unemployment on individuals

Long-term unemployment makes it harder for an individual or family to access housing, education, health and other vital services. They may have less money to spend on food, accommodation, transport and similar daily expenses, as well as medical and dental appointments and other essentials. Relocating to cheaper housing often means moving away from their social support network; it may also make them more reliant on community services.

Financial and psychological stress can lead to poor health, or exacerbate existing health conditions. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, long-term unemployed people are twice as likely as employed people to smoke; twice as likely to have back problems; three times as likely to suffer from mental, emotional and behavioural disorders and approximately twice as likely to have a disability. Long-term unemployment also increases the risk of self-harm, suicide and premature death.

This stress can put a strain on relationships, sometimes resulting in family breakdown. There are other effects on family, too: children whose parents or guardians have been unemployed long-term may experience poorer health and educational outcomes, and they are also more likely to experience long-term unemployment themselves as adults. Exposure to adults employed in paid work provides children with a model they can follow; the lack of such a model can make it harder to find a job, as the culture of the workforce is unfamiliar.

All of these difficulties are compounded by negative stereotypes of the long-term unemployed as 'dole bludgers'. Unemployment is often assumed to be the result of weak character, and not the result of structural and economic forces beyond a person's control. The effect of such stereotypes on someone's sense of self-worth can be demoralising.

## The impact of long-term unemployment on society

The social costs of long-term unemployment are also high. Industry suffers decreased productivity and the loss of skilled workers. Poverty has its own costs, including a growing gap between the rich and the poor and the increased social tension that results. Other costs include high levels of preventable physical and mental illness, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, crime and social disconnection – all of which lead to greater spending on social welfare.

### Example

#### Impacts of long-term unemployment

Amelia has always tried to do well at whatever she attempts. Having finished high school, she did a business degree and successfully completed it in three years. After graduating, she tried to find employment in the small town where she lived, so that she could also provide some support for her mother, who was recovering from a serious car accident.

She tried employment agencies and wrote many applications, but was always told that the problem was her lack of experience. She did volunteer work for a year to get some workplace skills, but even this did not help when it came to getting a job.

Amelia became depressed and despondent and found it difficult to get out of bed each day. She lost interest in her friends as well and spent most of her time at home watching television or movies.

When her mother had recovered, Amelia moved to a larger city where there were more opportunities. She finally found a job that suited her skills and interests, and soon found that her former enthusiasm and energy for life returned.

## Practice task 4

Read the case study and answer the questions.

### Case study

Katrina migrated to Australia with her children from the US, where she ran a refugee support service. Shortly after arriving, Katrina became extremely ill. She eventually recovered, but has had to learn to live with chronic pain.

After three years, Katrina has still not found employment and is starting to become very depressed. Katrina's rehabilitation officer suggests she approach a local community service provider. Katrina meets with a placement consultant who suggests, based on her background in community work, that she complete a diploma of community welfare work. With the support of the community service provider, Katrina receives her qualification.

She now works in her community and has started a refugee support service. Katrina feels she is actively contributing to her new country and helping refugees to feel more at home in Australian society.

- 1. Outline briefly how society benefits from the help Katrina received from community services.

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- 2. What are the ongoing benefits to society of Katrina's educational attainment?

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- 3. What impact may Katrina's employment have on her children? How does this benefit society as a whole?

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# 1E Identify factors associated with age in Australian society and their impact on clients

Ageism is discrimination based on a person's age. For example, some employers prefer to hire younger workers: they consider anyone over 50 to be too old to contribute new ideas, and worry that older workers will cost the company money by taking extra sick leave. Others have negative perceptions of young workers and reject them because they believe all young people are lazy and irresponsible.

While stereotypes may sometimes stem from real-life behaviours and characteristics, they are usually false, or at least exaggerated, and no individual ever fits a stereotype exactly. Stereotypes based on age are especially inaccurate: while an entire generation of people may share some characteristics, they are all individuals and have as many differences as similarities. It's just not possible that everyone born in the 1950s or everyone born in the 1980s shares the same mentality, attitude or personal qualities.

As a community worker, you need to be aware of the stereotypes associated with the age group you work with and understand the barriers these negative perceptions may pose for your clients. It is important to look beyond the stereotypes and examine the reasons for certain behaviours or tendencies in certain age groups.

## Working with young people

Older people often complain that young people are lazy, selfish and rude, or rebellious and slovenly, and that they:

- ▶ Don't want to work
- ▶ Want everything given to them
- ▶ Think they know everything
- ▶ Haven't experienced life
- ▶ Have no common sense
- ▶ Take unnecessary risks (such as using drugs or driving irresponsibly)

Young people may resent these stereotypes – particularly the charge that they do not have a good work ethic, which they hear frequently. If you are older than your clients, you need to be aware of the prejudice they encounter in their dealings with other people your age and how it makes them feel. The way you speak to them and interact with them will determine how receptive they are to your support.

## Working with older people

In many cultures, older people are valued and respected as the holders of wisdom and cultural knowledge. In Australian society, the emphasis on paid work as a measure of social status tends to devalue old age and reinforce negative stereotypes around ageing. In some cultures it would be unthinkable to place an older family member in a residential care facility; in Australia, this option has been available for many years.

Older people are frequently perceived as:

- ▶ Helpless
- ▶ Senile
- ▶ A burden on society
- ▶ In poor physical health, prone to illness and injury
- ▶ Unable to use technology or learn new skills, not flexible or adaptable
- ▶ Narrow-minded, old-fashioned or conservative
- ▶ Grumpy
- ▶ Boring

You clients may feel indignant, frustrated or angry at these stereotypes, and find them extremely hurtful. It is important when you work with people older than you to speak to them with respect and acknowledge their experience and continuing contribution to society.

## Example

### Ageism in the workplace

Belinda has been working in middle management at her organisation for eight years. When an opportunity arises to be promoted, she applies, but a younger male member of her current team is appointed to the position, despite having less experience, qualifications and skills. He came to the company two years ago, on the recommendation of a senior member of staff who was a personal friend and a member of the recent interview panel.

When Belinda asks why she was overlooked in favour of someone with less experience, she is told that she did not address the application criteria in sufficient depth. She knows that she prepared an excellent application and isn't satisfied with this response.

Belinda realises that it's not likely she'll ever be promoted within the company and starts to look outside the organisation for other opportunities. After months of submitting applications with no success, she realises that her age (57) is a significant barrier to finding a more senior position in a new firm.

Meanwhile, her new manager has proven to be incapable of doing his new job and is relying more and more on Belinda's skills to make up for his shortcomings. This is frustrating and demoralising for Belinda, and she becomes depressed and withdrawn.

# Practice task 5

Read the case study and answer the questions.

## Case study

Roger is 52 years old and works as a senior executive with a large company. One morning he is told his position has been made redundant as a result of company cutbacks. Although he has worked loyally and successfully for the company, his skills are no longer required.

Roger is taken aback, but he is sure his experience will get him back into a similar position within a matter of months. He feels he is definitely too young to retire.

After a holiday, Roger starts looking for work in earnest. He submits his résumé to recruitment agencies and calls on his network of contacts, but receives little response; his phone calls are seldom returned and he is not offered any interviews.

After many frustrating months, he contacts a few of the recruitment agencies to find out what is happening. Although no one says so outright, Roger can tell his age is the problem for prospective employers. Because it is against the law to discriminate on the basis of age, he is told instead that he does not have the correct skill set or that someone else with the right experience has just got the job.

Roger continues to apply for roles with little expectation, and becomes angry and bitter. After two years of unemployment, he loses contact with most of his friends. He does little to get his life back on track or seek professional support. The strain his behaviour places on his family results in a separation from his wife and estrangement from his children.

1. What factors might have led to the company making Roger redundant?

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2. What are some of the impacts of long-term unemployment that Roger is experiencing?

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3. Who else is affected by Roger’s unemployment and how are they affected?

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## Summary

- ▶ Major social and cultural institutions in Australian society include family, government, education, work, healthcare, aged care, the economy, law, media and religion.
- ▶ Community service workers need to understand the impact of these institutions on clients' lives.
- ▶ An individual's ability to participate in society is determined by factors such as gender, race, cultural background, age, education, employment, health, socioeconomic status and where they live.
- ▶ In Australia, long-term unemployment refers to a period of unemployment lasting for more than a year. Long-term unemployment can have a profound effect on an individual's health, on their family and on the community they live in.
- ▶ Community service workers must understand how ageism and negative stereotypes affect different age groups.

# Learning checkpoint 1

## Identify social and cultural issues impacting on clients in Australian society

### Part A

1. Identify at least three issues of concern in Australian society today.

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2. Where can you find information about current issues of concern?

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## Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

The Canetti family lives in a detached four bedroom suburban house owned by Mr and Mrs Canetti. They migrated to Australia from Italy in their early twenties. They have three children – Julia, aged 23, Alessandro, aged 17 and Angela, aged 15. Mr Canetti owns and runs a small business. Mrs Canetti is a bookkeeper and does the accounts for the family business.

Julia married at 19 and has three small children. Her husband Carlo works as a truck driver for a mining company. They live in a nearby suburb. Carlo often works away from home. Julia has a part time job as a teacher’s assistant and Mrs Canetti minds the children while Julia is at work, as they cannot afford to pay for childcare. Alessandro is in his final year of high school. He is a bright student and his parents would like him to continue to university.

Alessandro is more interested in music and his ambition is to play in a rock band. He has been using marijuana and has recently been charged with possession of an illegal drug. He has not yet told his parents about this. Angela attends the local Catholic high school. She has recently met an Iranian boy, Hassan. They are dating secretly. Hassan’s family is Muslim and neither family would approve of their relationship. Angela has started skipping school and her grades are falling.

Mrs Canetti’s mother, Lucia, aged 83, has started to show signs of dementia and has moved in with the family so that they can care for her. She is a widow and has no other family in Australia. The family business is struggling and Mr Canetti has recently taken out second mortgage on the house. With the downturn in the mining sector, Carlo’s job is not secure and he is taking more work away from home.

1. Identify three cultural issues which are affecting this family

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2. Identify economic factors that are affecting this family

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3. Do you think the Canetti family are disadvantaged? Why?

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## Topic 2

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 2A Use available information to identify and analyse social and cultural factors**

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- 2B Establish current health, wellbeing and associated needs**

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- 2C Make informed decisions about specific work to be undertaken**

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## Analyse impacts of social and cultural factors on clients

To do your job well and provide appropriate support, you must understand the impact of social and cultural factors on your clients and their health and wellbeing as well as their families and communities.

# 2A Using available information to identify and analyse social and cultural factors

*Good information will help you to formulate programs and services specifically to suit your clients.*

In the past, poor health and socioeconomic disadvantage were often seen as the fault of the individual or particular groups in the community, and not understood as a result of a complex combination of social and cultural factors. For example, addiction was seen as a failing of character, rather than a condition requiring treatment, and the policy response was campaigns with the message 'just say no', as if people with alcoholism or drug addiction could simply decide not to drink or take drugs anymore and only lacked the necessary willpower. Similarly, poverty was often thought to be caused by laziness, not by social and economic inequality, and the unemployed were told to 'get a job'. 'Victim-blaming' and negative stereotyping are still widespread, and people experiencing disadvantage are often stigmatised by others in society.

As a community service worker, you should not make assumptions based on stereotypes. You need to develop your research and observation skills, so you can collect and analyse information about the people and communities you work with, the social determinants that shape their lives, and how they are affected by social institutions and social policy.

## Collecting information

To collect information about a client's situation or an issue in the community, first you need to know exactly what information you're looking for. This might include:

- ▶ The number of people affected
- ▶ The age, gender or health status of people affected
- ▶ The socioeconomic or employment status of people affected
- ▶ The areas in which an issue is prevalent
- ▶ The availability of support services
- ▶ Social factors affecting marginalised communities in the area
- ▶ Cultural practices particular to marginalised communities in the area

## Listening to clients

Your first source of information is your clients. You should listen to them and ask questions, encouraging them to express their true thoughts and feelings.

Many will have had negative experiences of authority in the past and may not feel comfortable opening up, so it's important to show through your language and behaviour that you recognise their authority as experts on their own experience.

If you're developing a new program, for example, you need to find out what clients actually want from such a program and might hope to gain by participating in it. Other factors you need to take into account include the clients' cultural backgrounds, the languages they speak, their literacy levels and their prior education, employment and skills. Clients' history is important too, especially if they have experienced trauma and need higher levels of support as a result.

## Seeking a broader perspective

To get a broader perspective on your clients' situation, you can:

- ▶ Observe the community your service operates in
- ▶ Observe how services and programs operate, and how people respond to them
- ▶ Talk to your co-workers, your supervisor and other service providers
- ▶ Consult specialists, such as legal advisers and medical professionals
- ▶ Consult official sources, such as the Department of Social Services or the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- ▶ Read relevant articles in the media and professional journals
- ▶ Undertake further education and training

## Evaluating sources

*You need a critical approach to find the most useful information and relevant programs and services; when doing your research, you should always evaluate sources to be sure they are legitimate, and that what they offer is relevant to your clients and their needs.*

## Evaluating online information

If you are searching for information online, you should always make sure that the websites you consult and the information they provide is both accurate and authoritative. You should check what purpose the information is intended to serve, too, as the way it is presented may not be objective and unbiased. The information should also be relevant, with clear application to the issue or situation you are researching.

Criteria for evaluating online information	
<b>Accuracy</b>	<p>Authors can sometimes make mistakes or skew information to support their viewpoint. You need accurate information that is correct and precise.</p> <p>To determine whether online information is accurate, you can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Check its claims against an independent source</li> <li>▶ Compare statistics and citations to their original source</li> <li>▶ Check that the author's calculations are correct</li> </ul>
<b>Authority</b>	<p>Authoritative information is written by a reputable individual with the appropriate credentials and/or published by a reputable organisation.</p> <p>To determine whether online information is authoritative, you can ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Does the page you are reading link back to the home page of a reputable organisation, such as a government department, university or well-regarded research institute?</li> <li>▶ Is the author credited?</li> <li>▶ What are the author's credentials?</li> <li>▶ Are the author's or organisation's contact details provided?</li> <li>▶ Does the author cite their sources?</li> <li>▶ Does the author's position reflect the current consensus in the field? If not, do they acknowledge that fact?</li> </ul>

<b>Criteria for evaluating online information</b>	
<b>Currency</b>	<p>Current information is recent, and up to date with the latest research. To determine whether online information is current, you can ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ How recent is the information you are looking at?</li> <li>▶ Does the page you are looking at have a date on it?</li> <li>▶ When was the page you are looking at last updated?</li> <li>▶ When was the website last updated?</li> <li>▶ When was the website originally created?</li> </ul> <p>A website's longevity often adds to its credibility as a source, but remember, old information is not always taken down, so you could be looking at out-of-date material.</p>
<b>Objectivity</b>	<p>Objective information is based on fact, not opinion. It is collected carefully, avoiding assumption and bias. You should always look at a website's URL (web address), which tells you more about the purpose of the information you'll find on it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Commercial domains end in .com – the information may promote a particular product or service</li> <li>▶ Educational domains end in .edu – the information is likely to be reliable, but the institution that produced it may have religious affiliations</li> <li>▶ Government domains end in .gov – the information is likely to be reliable</li> <li>▶ Not-for-profit organisations' domains end in .org – the information may promote the organisation's agenda</li> </ul> <p>You should ask questions about the aim or purpose of the website you're looking at, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What is the aim of this website?</li> <li>▶ Why has the author or organisation published this information?</li> <li>▶ Is the purpose of this information to market something or promote an agenda?</li> </ul>
<b>Relevance</b>	<p>Relevant information is information you can use. It has a clear connection to the subject you are interested in. To determine whether online information is relevant, you can ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ How does this information relate to the subject I'm researching?</li> <li>▶ Does it relate to the right social groups?</li> <li>▶ Is this information useful in an Australian context?</li> <li>▶ Are the author's sources current?</li> </ul>

## Evaluating providers

If you're considering referring a client to another organisation or using programs developed by a third party, you need to check that they're reputable and that the services they provide are appropriate. To do this, you need to ask questions. For example, what are the other organisation's values? Do they align with your organisation's values?

Other questions might include:

- ▶ Is the organisation registered or associated with relevant professional bodies, such as the Australian Multicultural Council?
- ▶ Is the program endorsed and/or supported by government?
- ▶ Have other organisations within your sector heard of and/or used the program? What do they think of it?
- ▶ Does the program have clear, measurable outcomes? Is it run by reputable trainers? What are their qualifications?
- ▶ Is funding available to cover any associated costs?

## Analysing information

*Analysing information means looking at it from different angles or perspectives to break it down, identify patterns and explore relationships.*

Analysis is an important skill for community service workers; while you may know a person has a mental illness, for example, and that they are socially isolated because of this, you also need to identify other factors that may be contributing to their situation and look at different approaches you could take to support them.

Analysis may include looking at:

- ▶ Current research on a client's condition (such as a mental illness) or situation (such as homelessness)
- ▶ Social and cultural factors contributing to a situation
- ▶ Relevant legislation
- ▶ Available support services

### Steps in conducting an analysis

- ▶ Listen to your clients, ask questions and note the issues they raise
- ▶ Observe the community your service operates in and note any relevant information
- ▶ Talk to your co-workers and other service providers and note any insights they offer
- ▶ Check reliable sources and note any relevant information you find
- ▶ Consider other factors that may be contributing to the situation
- ▶ Collect all of this information together, break it down and look for patterns and relationships
- ▶ Identify the most important issues or factors
- ▶ Use the insights you've gained from this analysis as a basis for action

## Keeping up to date

The social and cultural factors affecting clients' lives are constantly changing, so you need to keep up to date with current and ongoing research. You should always take advantage of any courses or professional development your organisation offers – even if you attended a seminar on a particular topic in the past, the information may no longer be current.

### Example

#### Collecting information and conducting an analysis

Anya works in the library at an aged-care centre. She is responsible for managing the library resources as well as providing assistance for the many patrons who visit the facility each day.

She has noticed that many patrons stop and chat about their books while they are in the library, which blocks the aisles and disrupts those who want to have quiet time to read.

She decides to survey the library users to see if there is a need for a formal reader group and/or an informal reader cafe where patrons can relax and enjoy their discussions. She distributes a brief survey to library users and asks them to respond with their thoughts.

The results of her survey indicate overwhelming interest the idea of a cafe for readers, so Anya checks the relevant by-laws and then makes enquiries to see if any local cafe owners would be interested in setting up a branch in a suitable space in the building, just adjacent to the library. With this information in hand, she is in a good position to approach the building manager to see if a lease can be negotiated.

The survey also reveals that a small number of library users are interested in a formal discussion group. With their permission, Anya puts them in touch with each other, and they decide to meet at each other's homes each week to discuss what they are reading.

### Example

#### National Drug Strategy Household Survey

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare conducts the comprehensive National Drug Strategy Household Survey every three years. The purpose of this survey is to:

- ▶ Provide data about the use of tobacco, alcohol and other substances, including current levels of use and patterns and trends
- ▶ Identify groups at high risk of drug abuse
- ▶ Measure community awareness of legal and illegal drugs
- ▶ Measure community support for various drug-related policies

The most recent survey was conducted in 2019, so data from the 2016 survey is no longer up to date. If you offer a program that was developed using findings from the 2016 survey, you may need to update it, to ensure the program is still relevant.

# Practice task 6

Read the case study and respond to the questions that follow.

## Case study

Tuan is a community service worker with an organisation that helps immigrants settle into the local community. He recently read an article in the local newspaper about an enculturation program that has apparently been used very successfully in a nearby area, and he wants to find out more.

The article includes contact details for the company that runs the program. Tuan calls and speaks to a woman who is very persuasive about the benefits of the program and what she can offer Tuan’s organisation and its clients. She sends Tuan a link to the program’s website. It looks professional and includes many testimonials from community organisations and program participants. It also has information about the fees the company charges to run the program.

Tuan doesn’t need permission to purchase the program, but it’s expensive, so he wants to make sure it is worth the money. He asks his supervisor about the program, but she has not heard of it. Tuan searches for more information online and finds a warning notice on a government website identifying the program as a scam.

Luckily, Tuan conducted his own research before making a decision.

1. If Tuan still wants to find an enculturation program, what information should he collect first to establish his clients’ needs?

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2. What information should Tuan seek about organisations offering enculturation programs? What questions should he ask?

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## 2B Establishing current health, wellbeing and associated needs

*The health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities is not just the responsibility of the healthcare system: other social institutions also contribute, and social and community services play a big part.*

As a community service worker, you may be directly involved in promoting public health – educating clients about exercise and nutrition, for example, or helping them to develop the skills they need to care for themselves – but no matter what your role, you will often need to coordinate your efforts with those of healthcare providers and other organisations and services to maximise your clients' health and wellbeing. In addition to healthcare, a client may also need better access to housing and transport, for example, as well various forms of social support.

You should start by establishing the client's current levels of health and wellbeing and any associated needs. There are several different ways to collect this information, including interviews, questionnaires, surveys and checking records such as case notes. To achieve full understanding of the situation, you may need to use several different strategies. It is important to take all of a person's needs into account before you start looking for solutions.

### Conducting interviews

To establish a client's current health and wellbeing, you can interview them directly. It may also be necessary to interview others, such as members of their family, carers or health professionals responsible for their treatment, such as their general practitioner.

A person's health and medical history are sensitive subjects, so you need to be careful when asking questions, showing respect through your behaviour, language and tone.

When you speak to a client directly, you should note their posture, gait, speech, appearance, personal hygiene and their ability to converse, as well as asking about their general health, their medical history and any treatments they are receiving or medications they are taking. You also need to discuss factors such as the type of housing they live in, the suburb/area they live in, the social activities they engage in and so on. All of this information is relevant and will help you to establish the client's needs. For example, if they have just moved to a new community and don't know anyone, that may help you to understand why they're not eating well and have been feeling depressed.

After your interview, prepare a full observational record. This information you've gathered should help you identify the client's specific needs, such as personal care support, a social activities program or advocacy for improved housing conditions.

## Questionnaires and surveys

A questionnaire or survey can help you to identify an individual's or community's current levels of health and wellbeing and identify issues needing attention.

For example, you could give an individual a questionnaire about eating habits to establish their nutritional needs; you may also conduct a survey at a local community centre to find out about the challenges centre users face in accessing fresh food or preparing meals. The answers will help you to identify problems and find solutions to address them.

When you ask people to fill in a questionnaire or survey, explain as clearly and simply as you can why you are asking these questions and what you intend to do with the information. If they understand your purpose in asking for this information, they are more likely to participate and to be honest in their responses.

## Checking records

Another way to learn more about a client's health and wellbeing is to check any records or case notes that you have permission to view. Remember that such records may be confidential; if you're not sure what information you are permitted access to, ask your supervisor.

Case notes written by your co-workers and other professionals can be a useful source of additional information, as they may have noted something you are unaware of, or have missed. For example, a client who seems uncharacteristically lethargic and uncooperative may be grieving for a friend who has died; if they don't mention this to you, you have no way of knowing what has brought about this change, but a co-worker's notes may fill in the missing detail.

## Access to housing

*When working with clients, you need to be aware of the impact housing can have on their health and wellbeing.*

Ideally, a client's housing should be close to transport and services, employment opportunities and social and leisure activities. It should also be affordable: households spending more than 50 per cent of their gross income on rent or mortgage payments are likely to suffer financial stress, and for low-income households that figure drops to 30 per cent.

Home ownership is associated with better health outcomes for individuals, families and communities, but the high cost of housing means that it is out of reach for many Australians. High-density housing is becoming more common as a result, with serious consequences for the health of residents and the entire community, due to poor design and location, inadequate management and overcrowding. Residents of more affordable suburbs and new developments on the outer edges of cities also have to cope with poor access and amenities, as do many people living in rural and remote areas.

## Types of housing

People have different housing needs at different stages of their lives; you should be aware of the types of housing available, so you can help clients find affordable accommodation that best supports their health and wellbeing. Unfortunately, affordable housing is often of a low quality and finding appropriate accommodation can be difficult.

### Rental properties

Renting offers tenants flexibility; they do not need to stay on at the end of a lease if they decide they do not like the area or the property. If tenants are looking for security, though, this flexibility isn't helpful; a landlord can ask them to move out at the end of the lease even if they prefer to stay, or put the rent up. The quality of rental housing can also be a problem, and many tenants report difficulties in arranging essential repairs and basic maintenance. In poor-quality rental properties, pest control and insufficient protection against heat, cold, draughts and noise may also be an issue.

### Public or social housing

Public or social housing is rental housing owned and managed by government or non-government organisations. Rents are generally set below market levels and are determined by the income of the household. Since the 1990s, public housing has increasingly been targeted only at those in greatest need, including the homeless, people with disabilities and those on very low incomes. Access is managed using waiting lists; high-priority applicants may wait less than three months, while others may wait more than two years.

### Boarding houses

Boarding houses are privately owned and run for a profit. They are an important source of low-cost accommodation and in many cases are an option of last resort, or only resort, for disadvantaged people on low incomes. A large number of people with disabilities, many of whom have been deinstitutionalised, live in boarding houses. The number of boarding houses is currently in decline, due to a range of external factors, including the growing value of land in urban centres and stricter government regulations that mean running a boarding house is no longer as profitable.

### Residential aged care

The majority of people living in residential aged care in Australia are over 65. People who live in residential care often have more acute needs than those who remain in their own homes, making access to healthcare particularly important. Living in residential aged care is a recognised risk factor for social isolation and disconnection from community. A community service worker can seek to increase residents' social contact, support the maintenance or development of social connections and create opportunities for engagement.

### Supported independent living/specialist disability accommodation

Supported independent living (SIL) and specialist disability accommodation (SDA) are funded by the National Disability Insurance Scheme. SIL provides help with daily tasks in a shared living arrangement. It is the role of community service workers to assist clients as they develop the skills they need to live as independently as possible. SDA funding is provided to people with extreme functional impairment or very high support needs to access accommodation designed or modified to meet their needs. The eligibility criteria for SDA are strict and the number of eligible people is small.

## Access to transport

*Access to transport can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.*

If people don't live within walking distance of buses trains or trams, or in communities without public transport, they may have difficulty accessing fresh food and recreational facilities, as well as healthcare and support services. This is a particular problem for people in rural and remote communities. It also affects those who can't drive, or can't afford to, and those who have limited mobility, including some people with disabilities and older people who no longer have a driver's licence.

Sometimes it is not enough to put a client in touch with an organisation or make an appointment for them; you may need to arrange transport for them too. Most areas have community transport services that can take individuals or groups to and from shopping centres, medical appointments and social and recreational activities as required, or programs subsidising taxis or other forms of private transport.

## Access to social support

*Social contact is essential to our health and wellbeing, and isolation can be a particular problem for those experiencing physical or mental illnesses.*

When you are unwell, other problems become harder to cope with. Clients experiencing physical or mental illnesses, injury or chronic pain may need greater levels of support, especially if they don't have the resources or social network they need to manage their condition.

People dealing with illness may have to leave their jobs, or cut back on the hours they work, which can lead to financial hardship. Many feel the loss of social connection when they cannot work, and may also experience stigma: Australians often stereotype people receiving sickness benefits or workers compensation as 'bludgers' or malingers. Employers may discriminate against them too, even though this is against the law.

Some may not have a social network to draw on, while others may be cut off from their social support system when their needs become too hard to manage. Some may withdraw from family or friends due to feelings of hopelessness or alienation. Chronic illness, stress and isolation can also lead to substance abuse.

A client's cultural background is relevant too. You may need to find out about their language and literacy skills, so that you can source information in the appropriate language or arrange an interpreter or translator. A client's personal history can also present barriers to engagement; for example, a refugee who has fled persecution might be reluctant to deal with authorities, making it hard to connect them with services they need. A person's cultural beliefs and practices, such as dietary requirements and attitudes towards interactions with people of the opposite sex, should also be taken into account.

## Finding solutions

Once you have collected and analysed your information, taking into account any relevant social and cultural factors, you are ready to start thinking about solutions. Brainstorming is often a useful technique: you can hold a session with clients or co-workers to come up with as many ideas as possible in a short period of time. Including others in such discussions can be beneficial, as they may have suggestions you might not have considered. At the end of the session, list all the ideas and discuss which would be most effective.

The client or community you are working with should always be a part of these discussions and any decision-making that follows. Consulting the people affected by an issue has a positive effect on both their self-esteem and their engagement with community services.

### Example

#### Establishing a client's situation and needs before taking action

Jo, a woman in her late fifties, has recently undergone a traumatic divorce. As a result, she experiences a severe emotional and mental breakdown. She is hospitalised and treated for her illness and is not able to work for many months. Her case worker, Shalini, asks Jo how she is coping financially. Jo says that she has very little savings, but she has worked for many years for the same employer, who has offered to pay her the long service leave she is owed to support her during her time off work.

Jo plans to accept the offer, but Shalini asks her to speak to her employer and tell them she needs a few days to look at her options. Shalini does some research and confers with Centrelink. She finds out that a lump sum payment would disqualify Jo from receiving sickness benefits, which would cause her severe financial strain. Shalini explains the situation to Jo, who tells her employer not to pay out her long service leave.

## Practice task 7

Read the case study, then complete the task that follows.

### Case study

Hilltown is in a low-SES area with a large refugee community, high levels of unemployment and low levels of self-reported health and wellbeing. The community is often portrayed negatively in the media.

The workers at the Hilltown community service centre want to do more to support their community and improve general levels of health and wellbeing. First, they talk to residents about the issues they face and the kind of support they need, then they research programs run by other community centres in similar areas. After brainstorming possible options with the residents and workers from other agencies in the community, they come up with a concept they call 'The doors are always open'.

The idea is to make the centre a kind of hub, not just running its own programs but also acting as an access point, helping to connect residents with other organisations in the area so they can access their services. The hub will be staffed by workers who speak community languages. Another worker will be responsible for regularly updating a database all staff can access with details of the services offered by other organisations in the area, including healthcare, English-language and literacy programs, and education and training.

After the hub has been in operation for a year, residents in the community report improved levels of health and wellbeing.

1. Why are negative portraits of refugees and unemployed people in the media an example of victim-blaming?

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2. Why do you think residents' health and wellbeing improved in the year after the community workers set up the hub?

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3. What positive effects does it have when you include people affected by a social issue in discussions about possible solutions?

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# 2C Make informed decisions about specific work to be undertaken

In the course of their work, community service workers have to make constant decisions about the most appropriate action to take. For example, you might have to decide if a client needs emergency accommodation or if they can wait for public housing; or perhaps they need advice about which income support payment to apply for.

Decisions should always be informed by the client's thoughts and feelings. Your decision-making should also be informed by a sound analysis of the client's situation that takes into account the input of your co-workers, the opinion of specialists and current research. Solutions that are not based on careful consultation and up-to-date information from reliable sources are likely to fail.

Any decisions you make should also be informed by the relevant legislation and by your organisation's values, policies and procedures.

## Reliable sources

Your organisation may have its own database you can draw on; it may also have a database of agencies, organisations and other sources that can provide information relevant to particular social and cultural factors, such as mental illness, racism, homophobia, poverty or homelessness.

Current data is available from organisations such as:

- ▶ The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- ▶ The Australian Bureau of Statistics
- ▶ Government departments, such as the Department of Social Services
- ▶ Professional associations, such as the Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA)

Studies, research reports and survey findings published online or in professional journals can be a good source of useful information too, but it is important to establish that both the author and the publisher are reputable.

## Standards, policies and procedures

*Standards, policies and procedures are used as benchmarks to measure the effectiveness of services and whether they are achieving their intended outcomes.*

In many sectors, providers must meet legislated service standards to qualify for government funding. These standards are used to monitor service provision and outcomes. You should be familiar with the relevant legislation, as the work you do and any decisions you make must comply with it.

Organisations also have their own standards that their employees are expected to meet. These are often based on wider industry or sector standards. The organisation you work for will require you to make decisions in line with its values and complying with its standards, policies and procedures.

**Example**

**Making informed decisions**

Katie works with the schools in her local community to ensure students who are at risk of dropping out receive the support they need to ensure their ongoing attendance and engagement. Some of the students she works with come from minority religious groups.

Katie is a member of a number of professional organisations and reads their newsletters to keep up with recent research about barriers to education for young people at risk. One day she finds an article describing recent research into adapting the curriculum for students from minority backgrounds. Using the details from the article, she is able to track down the original research and discovers some interesting statistics about positive outcomes from tailoring learning materials to suit students' individual needs.

After analysing this information, Katie decides to talk to teachers at the schools she works with. Together, they brainstorm ways to adapt classroom materials for students from minority religious groups. Katie asks the students to contribute their ideas too, to be sure the new materials will meet their needs.

## Practice task 8

1. Why do you need to understand the effects of social and cultural factors on the people you provide services to? Give at least two examples, either from your own work experience or from your reading.

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2. Research and analyse a particular social or cultural issue; for example, racism, sexism, homophobia or negative stereotyping of people experiencing unemployment. Outline three ways in which your chosen issue can affect a person.

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## Summary

- ▶ To do your job well and provide appropriate support, you must understand the impact of social and cultural factors on your clients and their wellbeing, as well as their families and communities.
- ▶ As a community service worker, you should not make assumptions based on stereotypes. You need to develop your research and observation skills so you can find accurate, relevant information.
- ▶ Your first source of information is your clients. You should listen to them and ask questions. You can gain a broader perspective through observation and by consulting other sources.
- ▶ You should always evaluate sources to be sure their information is accurate, authoritative, current and objective, and that it is relevant to your clients and their needs.
- ▶ The health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities is not just the responsibility of the healthcare system: social and community services play a big part.
- ▶ A client's health and wellbeing is affected by social and cultural factors, such as access to housing, transport and social support.
- ▶ The client or community you are working with should always be a part of the discussion when you are looking for solutions and making decisions. Colleagues and other professionals can also contribute useful ideas.
- ▶ Consulting the people affected by an issue has a positive effect on both their self-esteem and their engagement with community services.
- ▶ Solutions that are not based on careful consultation and up-to-date information from reliable sources are likely to fail.
- ▶ Any decisions you make should also be informed by and comply with the relevant legislation and your organisation's values, standards, policies and procedures.

## Learning checkpoint 2

# Analyse impacts of social and cultural factors on clients

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in analysing impacts of social and cultural factors on clients.

### Part A

1. What data could be relevant to analysing the impact of social and cultural issues on people's lives?

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2. Where could you find this data?

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## Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

### Case study

Alma is 68 years of age. She grew up in a small country town, is an only child and was born when her parents were in their 40s. Alma was diagnosed with schizophrenia when she was 19 and spent the following 15 years as an in-patient in a large psychiatric hospital in the city. While she was in hospital, all her teeth were extracted and she has worn dentures since she was in her early twenties. When she was discharged, she lived in a nearby boarding house for several years and received regular visits from a community psychiatric nurse who assisted with her medication.

The boarding house was overcrowded and in poor repair. During this time her only income was a disability pension from Centrelink. The boarding house provided basic accommodation, breakfast and an evening meal. Boarders had to leave the premises between 10.00 am and 5.00 pm. Most of the other boarders were people with mental illnesses, homeless men and younger people with disabilities.

Alma formed a relationship with Dave, one of the male boarders. During the day Alma and Dave spent most of their time in hotels and bars. He was a heavy drinker and sometimes became abusive and violent towards Alma. Alma became pregnant but miscarried at four months. While she was in hospital the boarding house was closed down and Dave left town. Alma was assisted by a social worker to find state housing accommodation and she moved into a one bedroom unit in a high rise block in an inner city area. Most of her neighbours are recent migrants and refugees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

She is registered with a busy city medical practice and her medication is prescribed by one of their GPs. There is a high staff turnover and she is not always able to see the same GP. Alma is very overweight, has recently been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure and is showing early signs of dementia. She smokes heavily and has frequent respiratory infections. She experiences occasional episodes when she hallucinates and hears voices. She now receives the age pension. Her schooling was interrupted because of her illness, and because of this she has limited literacy skills and has never held a job. She spends most of her time watching her favourite soap operas on TV. Although she has been living in her unit for many years, she does not know any of her neighbours and has no close friends. Her parents died many years ago.

1. Identify Alma's significant health issues.

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## Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

**3A** Monitoring impact

**3B** Conducting reviews

**3C** Making adjustments

## Monitor impact of social and cultural factors on community work

*Evaluating your work and its impact are part of your role as a community service worker and an essential part of the cycle of service planning and delivery.*

When you are planning a service or program, whether it is for an individual person or intended to address the needs of a group or community, you also need to plan how you will evaluate its effectiveness. This will help you to set clear objectives and choose effective strategies for achieving those outcomes. The evaluation process allows individuals and organisations to reflect on what they have achieved and use this information to improve the programs and services they provide.

In addition, both government and non-government community services organisations are accountable for the funding they receive. Continually evaluating your work helps to ensure that outcomes are successfully delivered and that workers comply with government regulations and organisational policies.

The evaluation process has three steps. The first is monitoring your work and its impact by collecting data. The second is reviewing and analysing that data, and the third is making changes or adjustments in response to the evidence.

# 3A Monitoring impact

*Programs and services must be regularly reviewed to be sure that they are achieving their intended outcomes – but to review your work, you first need to monitor its progress and impact.*

Collecting data as you go is important; you should never rely on memory to fill in detail down the track, as it can lead to error. Monitoring your work can also help you to identify potential issues early on, including the impact of social and cultural factors that might not have been anticipated.

For example, monitoring initial attendance rates at an activity program at a community centre can help you to gauge its success in attracting groups you are trying to target. If the program was not aimed specifically at one gender but most of the participants are men, it may be that gender roles or cultural norms within the community are preventing women from benefiting from the program in its current format. You can then take steps to address these factors.

## Your role

It is every community service worker's responsibility to monitor their own performance and the impact of the work they do. You need to make sure that you:

- ▶ Understand your responsibilities and their limits
- ▶ Maintain good working relationships with clients and co-workers
- ▶ Accommodate clients' values and beliefs
- ▶ Behave ethically, complying with relevant legislation, standards, policies and procedures

In some roles you may also have responsibility for monitoring the work of others and the delivery and impact of services and programs.

## Understanding your responsibilities

Make sure you are familiar with the duties described in your position description. You should also be aware of the limits of your responsibilities, which are determined by your role, qualifications and experience. Always consult other professionals when necessary and refer complex situations to your supervisor or manager.

Whatever your official duties, you are likely to have additional responsibilities, such as collaborating with your team to plan and carry out community work and associated services. Monitoring the impact of your work is another of these responsibilities and an important part of your job, even if it isn't mentioned in your position description.

You will generally be given information about documenting your work by your team leader or manager as part of an induction process and on an ongoing basis. You can also consult organisational policies and procedures, which should be provided in hard copy and/or in electronic format.

Watch this video for more information about responsibilities at work.



## Working with others

*When making plans or decisions, you must always consult the person you are supporting and listen to what they say.*

Everyone has the basic right to make decisions and choices about their lives, including the services they receive. Taking a collaborative approach demonstrates trust and respect and enhances your working relationship with clients, who are more likely to engage with plans made with their input.

After meeting with clients, write up or check over your notes and take a moment to reflect. Was there anything you would do differently if you could? Are any patterns emerging in your interactions with this person? Monitoring your progress in building relationships can help you to do a better job and provide more effective support.

Your co-workers, supervisor and other professionals are also a useful source of advice, information, ideas and feedback. Working with others and listening to their opinions can help you to be more objective and to step back and see the bigger picture.

## Accommodating others' values and beliefs

You may often work with individuals, families or communities who do not share your values or beliefs. A client's attitudes or opinions may seem strange or outdated to you, or you may not share their faith or religious beliefs. For example, it's not unusual to hold differing views on family, marriage and gender roles.

The relationship you build with clients is crucial and can be easily damaged if you let a clash of values or beliefs affect the service you are delivering. Being aware of this and monitoring your own reactions and responses can help you to keep them in check and conduct yourself professionally.

The people you support have the right to have their social and cultural needs addressed, and to be treated with respect and dignity. You have a duty of care to support them in a way that meets those needs. You must acknowledge the differences in your belief systems and work out ways to accommodate them while maintaining a good working relationship with the client. If you do not, you may undo any progress made and lose their trust.

## Behaving ethically

Your role, when your values are different from those of a client, is to remain non-judgmental and to ensure that they have all the relevant information they need, including all the available options and likely outcomes, so they can make an informed choice. Unless a person has been legally assessed as not having capacity to make decisions; or is an involuntary patient in a psychiatric facility; or a prisoner serving a custodial sentence, all people have this basic right. Even in these situations, people have the right to be treated ethically.

You can find the Australian Community Workers Association's code of ethics at [aspirelr.link/acwa-code-of-ethics](https://www.aspirelr.com.au/link/acwa-code-of-ethics). You should also be familiar with your organisation's code of ethics, if it has one.

**To ensure that ethical decisions are made:**

- ▶ Follow your organisation's policies and procedures
- ▶ Comply with the relevant code of ethics, professional standards and relevant legislation
- ▶ Monitor your work to ensure you stay within the boundaries of your role
- ▶ Meet the performance indicators set out in your position description
- ▶ Provide appropriate support to other team members

## Selecting performance indicators

*Before you select performance indicators, you need to be clear about the objective of your work. Performance indicators should always have a direct relationship to the outcomes you want to achieve.*

Some organisations use a checklist of performance indicators to structure their monitoring and review processes. These indicators measure the impact a program or service is having and whether it is achieving its intended outcomes.

Such checklists can be developed for a specific service provider, work team, community or client, and for specific programs and services, in order to collect information from a particular perspective.

**Examples of performance indicators**

- ▶ The program or service is appropriate to a client's age, abilities and needs
- ▶ The program or service is implemented in a way that takes social and cultural factors into account
- ▶ Clients are satisfied with the program or service
- ▶ Clients are making satisfactory progress and the program or service is meeting their needs
- ▶ Resources (including time, personnel, equipment and funds) are appropriate and sufficient
- ▶ Key personnel are given regular progress reports and are satisfied with the work being done

## Collecting data

Monitoring the impact of your work requires collecting data about the planning, delivery and outcomes of programs and services. The data you collect should relate to the performance indicators you have selected.

To collect data, you can use strategies such as:

- ▶ Interviews with clients before, during and after their engagement with a program or service
- ▶ Questionnaires
- ▶ Observation checklists
- ▶ Self-assessment evaluations
- ▶ Discussion groups
- ▶ Measuring uptake/attendance/use, etc.

Some strategies seek to capture a client's subjective experience of a program or service by asking them to describe their thoughts, feelings and opinions about it. Other strategies provide objective measures of things that can be counted or quantified, such as how many people participate in a program or how frequently clients interact with a service. Both subjective and objective data are useful in monitoring the impact of your work.

## Practice task 9

Read the case study, then complete the task that follows.

### Case study

Angela is a case worker at a non-government agency that supports young people from low-SES and disadvantaged backgrounds. Angela is studying part-time for a diploma of community services. As part of her studies, she develops and implements a program to support young refugees in the area, whose school attendance and completion rates are low.

Angela bases her program on research identifying risk factors for the group of young people she works with. The researchers found that biculturalism – a person's ability to 'keep one foot' in their heritage culture and their new culture at the same time – was a strong predictor of successful outcomes, so Angela starts by reading more about it. She learns that there is more to biculturalism than speaking two languages; it's about identifying with and operating within two cultures at once.

The research findings demonstrated that:

- ▶ Recognising and valuing a person's bicultural identity can enhance their self-confidence and sense of belonging
- ▶ Teachers can play a significant role in supporting biculturalism by encouraging students to discuss or write about their heritage culture and share this with other students

In consultation with her manager, Angela develops a program to encourage teachers to value their students' cultural diversity and provide learning experiences that promote biculturalism. The program also involves educating students' parents so that they will support and encourage the bicultural approach.

Angela must decide on performance indicators, monitor the program, review it and report on its outcomes. She decides that the program will have succeeded if the students have:

- ▶ A sense of hope for the future
- ▶ A feeling of connection to the school community
- ▶ Support from their families both to maintain connections to their heritage culture and to develop connections to Australian culture

Her manager suggests that she adds a fourth indicator, making improved attendance rates a measure of the students' engagement.

Over a six-month period, Angela helps teachers provide a bicultural curriculum and meets regularly with parents. She also conducts interviews with the students before the program starts and after it has ended.

At the end of the program, the students report greater optimism about the future and a stronger feeling of connection to the school community. Their attendance rates have improved, and they say that their families are now more supportive of their efforts to negotiate their two cultures.

Angela concludes that her program is helping to reduce the risks to young refugee students. She presents her findings to management at her agency and gains an increase in funding to roll the program out to other schools in the community.

1. What are some of the sociocultural factors that Angela considers in developing the program?

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2. What was the program's intended outcome?

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3. How did Angela choose the indicators of success? Why did her supervisor suggest that she add another?

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4. Why is it important to choose the right indicators to measure the success of a program?

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# 3B Conducting reviews

*By monitoring and documenting their work, organisations build up a body of data they can analyse to establish how effective their efforts have been.*

You need to understand what works and what does not, and why this is so. Reviewing your policies, procedures and outcomes will help you to do so. It's also important to identify any social and cultural factors that may have influenced the outcome of a particular program or service, and the impact these factors might have had on the individual client, group or community you are working with.

How often you are required to review your work depends on the service you are providing, the internal policies of your organisation, and legislative or funding requirements. Many organisations conduct a progress review about halfway through a program or service's delivery cycle; nearly all conduct a final review at the end. If a program or service is a success, it's useful to have evidence you can present to funding bodies and managers to justify its continuation. If it needs improvement, analysing and evaluating your data will help you identify the changes you should make, such as steps you can take to reduce or eliminate the negative effects of social and cultural factors on outcomes for clients. The final step in a review is often to write a report, making a list of recommendations for future improvements.

## Collating information

To review your work, you need to collate all the data you have collected while monitoring its progress and impact.

You may wish to supplement this data with additional information, which you can gather using strategies such as interviews, questionnaires, surveys or discussion groups. To get the broadest possible overview, you can seek feedback from:

- ▶ Clients who participated in a program or used a service
- ▶ Staff who were involved in the delivery of the program or service
- ▶ Other service providers and professionals who work your organisation or its clients

Some organisations have standard forms or checklists they use in reviewing a program or service, to ensure consistency.

**Checklist for reviewing a program or service****Service planning**

Did the service plan:

- ▶ Ensure equity of access
- ▶ Identify relevant social and cultural factors
- ▶ Identify performance indicators
- ▶ Describe how outcomes are measured
- ▶ Identify participants
- ▶ Identify each person's role
- ▶ Identify a complaints process
- ▶ Give clear reporting guidelines
- ▶ Identify risks
- ▶ Include a contingency plan?

**Service provision**

Did the provision of the service:

- ▶ Follow all organisational policies and procedures
- ▶ Meet relevant legislative requirements
- ▶ Meet industry standards
- ▶ Identify resources needed
- ▶ Meet ethical standards
- ▶ Address social and cultural factors
- ▶ Document all actions, feedback and complaints?

**Performance indicators**

Did the program:

- ▶ Set clear performance indicators
- ▶ Collect relevant data to measure performance and outcomes
- ▶ Meet key performance indicators?

**Accountability**

Did the program:

- ▶ Follow relevant reporting procedures
- ▶ Provide the services specified in the service plan
- ▶ Conduct a financial audit?

## Analysing information

After collating your data, the next step is to analyse it. You are looking for evidence of:

- ▶ Performance indicators that were met
- ▶ Performance indicators that were not met
- ▶ Strategies and initiatives that worked well
- ▶ Strategies and initiatives that did not work well or did not work at all
- ▶ Social and cultural factors that were identified and successfully addressed
- ▶ Social and cultural factors that were identified but were not successfully addressed
- ▶ Social and cultural factors that were not identified
- ▶ Themes that emerged in feedback from clients, co-workers and other service providers

## Evaluating policies, procedures and outcomes

*Reviewing the effectiveness of your work includes reviewing the strategies and processes you are using as well as reviewing outcomes.*

### Procedural evaluation

‘Procedural evaluation’ means reviewing the work an organisation does to make sure workers are complying with organisational policies and procedures and the relevant legislation. For example, it might mean checking that workers are following confidentiality guidelines, that the organisation responds to complaints from service users within a certain period of time, or that funding applications are being filled in correctly. Workers should have easy access to a copy of their organisation’s procedures manual, so they can check the guidelines if they need to and monitor their own performance against them.

Examples of questions you might ask when conducting a procedural evaluation include:

- ▶ Did staff consistently meet organisational standards? If not, why not?
- ▶ Did staff follow organisational policies and procedures? If not, why not?
- ▶ What improvements could be made to ensure future compliance with standards, policies and procedures?

### Outcome evaluation

‘Outcome evaluation’ means reviewing programs and services to ensure that their outcomes meet stated goals. If a program or service is not achieving its intended outcomes, a review may help to identify any social or cultural factors that may be contributing. An organisation can use this information to provide clients with more appropriate support – for example, support tailored to a client’s age, or a particular community’s cultural background.

Questions you might ask when evaluating programs or services include:

- ▶ Were the desired outcomes achieved? If not, why not?
- ▶ Were the indicators used to measure outcomes adequate and appropriate?
- ▶ What improvements could be made to ensure the success of future programs or services?

## Evaluating the impact of social and cultural factors

*In reviewing the effectiveness of your work, you also need to look at the influence of social and cultural factors of both workers and clients, as well as their experiences and resources.*

For example, a course preparing participants to enter or re-enter the workforce may have failed because those who planned it didn't understand the needs of older clients, who required training to use a computer, or people experiencing long-term unemployment, who couldn't afford fares to travel to and from the course.

Common factors you should be aware of and consider in a review include:

- ▶ Age and ageism
- ▶ Cultural beliefs/values
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Employment status
- ▶ Family dynamics, including family breakdown
- ▶ Financial hardship
- ▶ Geographic location and access to transport
- ▶ Health and wellbeing
- ▶ Homelessness
- ▶ Homophobia and transphobia
- ▶ Racism
- ▶ Religion
- ▶ Sexism

Example	<b>Reviewing the effectiveness of a program or service</b>	
	The process and questions outlined below can be used to review a service or program.	
	<b>Steps</b>	<b>Questions</b>
	1. Identify any aspects of the program or service which are not being achieved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What is actually happening?</li> <li>▶ What has gone wrong?</li> <li>▶ Why has it gone wrong?</li> <li>▶ What needs to be changed?</li> <li>▶ How can it be changed?</li> </ul>
	2. Analyse the impact of any social or cultural factors relevant to the program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What factors have an impact on this program?</li> <li>▶ How do these factors affect this program?</li> <li>▶ Have these been taken into account?</li> </ul>
3. Identify the program's strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What has gone right so far?</li> <li>▶ What positive outcomes have been achieved so far?</li> <li>▶ What is working well?</li> <li>▶ Why is it working well?</li> </ul>	
1. Identify potential improvements, adjustments or alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ What else do we need to do to make this program viable?</li> <li>▶ What things need to be changed or done differently?</li> <li>▶ How can we make these changes?</li> </ul>	

# Practice task 10

Read the case study, then complete the task that follows.

## Case study

Zareb is a young Sudanese refugee. He and his family recently arrived in Australia after living in a refugee camp for several years. This camp was home to more than 80,000 people. Primary education was available there, but the curriculum was basic and there was a chronic shortage of educational resources. There was also frequent violence in the camp.

Zareb and his family are settled into an Australian community with other Sudanese families. They have received assistance, including counselling, from a number of services. Zareb has started attending the local high school.

After a few weeks, it is apparent that Zareb is not settling into school well. He is often absent and when he does attend he is disruptive. Zareb's teacher, Michael, seeks advice from a community organisation that works with the Sudanese community. Michael discovers that in the camp there was little day-to-day structure or routine, and that the highly structured school environment is alienating Zareb. He also discovers that many Sudanese refugees have had traumatic experiences.

Zareb's parents are not familiar with the expectations of the Australian education system. There are also language issues. Michael draws on the expertise of the community organisation's workers to work with Zareb and his parents. As a result of some changes that Michael makes to his classroom environment, his approach to teaching refugee children, and support from community organisations and the Sudanese community, Zareb engages with the school and starts to make progress.

1. What factors might have contributed to Zareb's difficulty in settling into an Australian high school setting?

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# 3C Making adjustments

*Making adjustments helps to ensure the service you are providing is doing what it set out to do.*

After reviewing your work, you may see signs that a program or service you have devoted a lot of time and effort to isn't achieving what it is intended to achieve. You can't ignore these signs or try to persevere with a program that is not achieving the desired outcomes, but it doesn't mean you have to cancel the program.

Asking program participants, as well as colleagues, for ideas about why the program is not working is essential. Including clients in this process encourages greater engagement and helps to ensure that you make informed decisions.

## **Adjusting the focus of a program**

There could be a number of reasons that a program isn't achieving the desired outcomes. For example, a support group aimed at young single mothers is unlikely to do well if no childcare is provided, but there could be other reasons too, such as a lack of public transport in the area. Providing childcare might not be enough to improve attendance; you might also need to provide a transport service to pick participants up from their homes, or give them cab vouchers.

Sometimes changes in focus may be needed to improve the effectiveness of a program. These could include:

- ▶ Identifying and responding to social and cultural factors that affect the program
- ▶ Placing more emphasis on prevention or early intervention rather than dealing with issues after they arise
- ▶ Promoting collaboration and partnerships between agencies or across industry sectors, or within existing communities and groups

**Example**

**Making changes to a program**

Ron is a senior worker in a care organisation. He has recently finished trialling a program for people experiencing long-term unemployment. The program included guest speakers from local businesses and industries; training for participants in interview skills, literacy, numeracy and the use of technology; and volunteer work placements. He has completed the monitoring and review phases of the program; as he writes his final report, he thinks about how to improve the program.

The program worked well for some participants, but social and cultural factors limited its effectiveness for others. These factors included:

- ▶ An inability to concentrate in a formal learning environment
- ▶ A lack of social skills while undertaking the volunteer work placement
- ▶ Frequent absences due to childcare issues

To ensure that the program continues to receive funding, Ron decides he needs to make adjustments to ensure that all participants are able to benefit from it in the future. Here are his notes.

**Information needed about social and cultural factors:**

- ▶ Why are some people are having difficulty concentrating?
- ▶ What social skills have been identified as lacking?
- ▶ What are the participants' childcare and other family responsibilities, and how do these responsibilities affect their ability to participate?

**How could this information be collected?**

Possible strategies:

- ▶ Do intake interviews and/or a pre-program assessment with all participants to identify individual goals and needs
- ▶ Do exit interviews and/or post-program assessment to collect information from the participants about their experiences, what they have achieved, and any changes they can suggest
- ▶ Collect feedback from volunteer workers to identify issues with social skills

Note:

- ▶ In feedback sessions, avoid singling out participants who have been less successful
- ▶ Be aware of/sensitive to social and cultural issues that might be a barrier to effective communication with the participants

**Who will be involved in the process of reviewing and evaluating the program?**

Possibilities:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Participants</li> <li>▶ Staff involved in delivering the program</li> <li>▶ Community representatives</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Volunteer workplace staff</li> <li>▶ Other relevant service providers</li> <li>▶ Employers/potential employers</li> <li>▶ Funding body representatives</li> </ul> |
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3. What are at least two characteristics shared by the people you are planning this service for? What are at least two significant shared needs? Again, support your answers with reference to at least one reliable source.

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4. What outcomes will your program work to achieve? Identify at least one clear, measurable outcome.

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5. What social and cultural factors are likely to affect your program and its participants? Identify and briefly discuss at least one significant factor, explaining how this factor might affect the program and its participants.

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6. What legislation is relevant to your planned service? Identify at least one piece of legislation relevant to your program and its participants and briefly explain why it is relevant.

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7. What strategies will you use to achieve your service's objective or intended outcome? Briefly describe at least one program or service and how you will deliver it.

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8. How will you monitor and review your program? What information will you need to collect? How will you collect it? Who will you include in monitoring and reviewing your program?

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## Summary

- ▶ As a community service worker, you will often be working with individuals, families and communities who do not necessarily share your values and beliefs.
- ▶ Be familiar with organisational policies and procedures so you are confident you and your team are working effectively, and in a way that meets your legal obligations.
- ▶ You must monitor and review the services you provide on a regular basis.
- ▶ Continuously monitor your work so you can be sure you are working within the boundaries of your role, meeting your performance indicators, providing appropriate support to team members and following the community services industry's code of conduct.
- ▶ A comprehensive evaluation processes reviews planning processes, implementation, performance indicators, resources and accountability.
- ▶ If a program or service does not meet its outcomes, you need to find out why and make appropriate adjustments.

# Learning Checkpoint 3

## Monitor impact of social and cultural factors on community work

### Part A

1. Identify three social and cultural factors which have an impact on what services are provided

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2. Choose a service provided to a group of clients in your own work role or a sample work role from a community service organisation.

- What impact do you think your own work role or the work role you have chosen as an example has on your clients?
- Does it restrict you in any way?
- Does it match the needs of the clients?
- Does it support you to work effectively?
- How effective are the agency's policies and procedures in supporting the work of the agency?

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## Part B

Choose a community services organisation service or program. This may be a service or program you know through work, volunteering or fieldwork placement.

OR

Develop and plan a service or program of your own to meet an identified need for a client group.

Plan a project to monitor and review the program you have chosen. If possible, carry out the project and report your results. You must obtain permission from the organisation to carry out this task. If you are working on a planned program only, you will not be able to conduct the actual evaluation; you will write a detailed evaluation plan instead.

1. Who is the program for?

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2. Identify at least two organisational policies and procedures which have an impact on the program.

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3. Comment on the effectiveness of one of these policies and procedures in supporting the work of the program.

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4. Looking at the cultural and social factors which affect these people, can you identify any barriers to them participating and/or fully engaging in the program?

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5. If you can identify any barriers, or any aspects of the program which are not working, what changes can you suggest to make improvements?

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