



SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONS

GENERAL NOTICE 2 of 2020

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27 March 2020

NOTICE TO:

ALL SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONALS (*social workers, social auxiliary workers, student social workers, student social auxiliary workers, child and youth care workers, auxiliary child and youth care workers and student child and youth care workers*)

ALL EMPLOYERS OF SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

GUIDANCE FOR SOCIAL SERVICE PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR EMPLOYERS ON SUSTAINED AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE DURING THE NATIONAL STATE OF DISASTER: COVID-19 PANDEMIC

- 1.1 The South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP) recognises that the country is currently dealing with a complex situation that calls on social service professionals to be part of the response, but also to take care of themselves and their loved ones.
- 1.2 The SACSSP appreciates that Cabinet declared the COVID-19 pandemic as a national disaster in terms of the Disaster Management Act. On 23 March 2020 President Ramaphosa announced an escalation of local exposures which led to the enforcement of a nation-wide lockdown for 21 days with effect from midnight on Thursday 26 March.
- 1.3 The SACSSP recognises the importance of the measures introduced to combat the further spread of COVID-19 to the millions of South African citizens, as well as, people from other countries within our borders. Furthermost significant is the recognition of an important role to protect those most vulnerable and at risk, such as the elderly, children, people with compromised immune systems, amongst others.
- 1.4 The COVID-19 pandemic presents the country with a medical emergency that coincides with social and emotional challenges that impacts on the people of our country and the world. However, it is not only a health issue, but a societal issue that reaches the very core of human well-being.
- 1.5 The guidelines published in this General Notice aims to provide basic information and guidance regarding COVID-19. Social workers, social auxiliary workers, child and youth care workers (professional category), child and youth care workers (auxiliary category) and students in social work and child and youth care work are required to bring themselves up to date with the facts related to COVID-19 and the national response. Helpful links are provided at the end of this General Notice. This General Notice is divided into the following areas:
 - General guidance for all
 - Essential social services by social service professionals
 - Employers
 - Social service professionals
 - Professional ethics
 - Private Practice
 - Sources of information

2. General guidance for all

- (a) If you feel sick and have an influenza-like illness stay at home (it may not be COVID-19. Check first with your medical practitioner). First take care of yourself. Do not go to work as you may pose a risk to your own health and the health of colleagues and clients.
- (b) Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- (c) Avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes. This also applies if you wear gloves.
- (d) If you cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth with a flexed elbow or tissue. Wash your hands after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose.
- (e) Wash your hands regularly with soap and running water (for 20 minutes) or use hand sanitizer.
- (f) Keep frequently touched common surfaces clean, i.e., telephones, computer equipment, etc.
- (g) Do not use other workers' phones, desks, office, or other work tools and equipment; if necessary, consider cleaning them first with a disinfectant. Also clean your own devices regularly.

(adapted from the CDC guidelines)

3 Essential social services by social service professionals

- 3.1 The SACSSP noted with appreciation that the Minister of Social Development announced on 24 March 2020 that she requested the Minister of Labour to include social service professionals into the list of persons providing essential services. Employers and social service professionals are encouraged to take note of any publication of this in the Government Gazette.
- 3.2 Social service professionals are reminded that they must carry an official form of identification (ID book or driver's license) as well as the Permit to Perform Essential Service (Annexure C: Form 1) as published in Government Notice No. R. 398 of 25 March 2020 (Government Gazette 43148).
- 3.3 Any social service professional who is required to provide an essential service, subject to the regulations published in the Government Gazette or permission obtained through the relevant authorities, shall at all times carry his or her Practice Card issued by the South African Council for Social Service Professions. In the case where a social service professional does not have a Practice Card, he or she must have his or her registration number with the SACSSP readily available to provide to authorities upon request for the purpose of verification.

4. Employers

- 4.1 Employers need to take responsibility for the health, safety and well-being of social service professionals on their employ and the following are recommended:

4.1.1 Information on COVID-19

- (a) Provide factual information on COVID-19 to all staff, including administrative staff.
- (b) Make information available in a manner that is accessible to staff members, whether at the workplace or at home, and update it regularly.
- (c) Assist social service professionals in your employ with up to date information to respond to the needs of clients and communities in a professional and timely manner. Identify credible sources of information that staff should consult when they need more information on COVID-19 (see paragraph 8.1)

- (d) Put in place measures that counter misinformation and fake-news, and act against those who wittingly spread misinformation.
- (e) Keep staff abreast with all development related to COVID-19 in the place of employment.

4.1.2 **Non-essential staff**

- (a) Ensure that non-essential staff adhere to the requirements related to the nation-wide lockdown.
- (b) Remote working or teleworking from home is encouraged where it is practical and feasible.
- (c) Employers need to extend all possible and reasonable support to such staff members.
- (d) Non-essential staff should not be required to come into the office during the period of the nation-wide lockdown.

4.1.3 **Essential staff (see paragraph 3)**

- (a) Only staff who are classified as essential staff, including social service professionals registered with the SACSSP, should work during period of the nation-wide lockdown.
- (b) It is recommended that the work arrangement of essential staff be flexible, including working from home, teleworking or limited work time in the office (with only a maximum number of staff members at one time at the office), staggered work hours or rotational working days (where not all staff are at the workplace at the same time).
- (c) In addition to the above, it is recommended that the work arrangements of essential staff in residential care facilities and institutions, be organised in such a manner that there is continuation of quality services, while precautions are in place to create a safe work environment.

4.1.3 **General**

- (a) Encourage health practices such as handwashing and basic hygiene. Ensure that soap and running water are available on the premises.
- (b) Avoid unnecessarily meetings and if needed keep it short and in venues where there is ample fresh air and social distancing can be practised.
- (c) Keep the workplace clean. Especially surfaces in common areas.
- (d) Do not discriminate against staff or clients that show possible symptoms or have COVID-19.
- (e) Support social service professionals and other staff with family responsibilities during this time.
- (f) Recognise and accept that the country is experiencing an exceptional situation and employ more flexible, yet still professional, arrangements in the workplace. For example, there may be a need for more telephone contact with clients and social partners during these times, than face-to-face sessions, which may mean higher telephone bills, but less fuel costs.

5. **Social service professionals**

5.1 Social service professionals are equally at risk to the COVID-19 virus and need to take all the necessary precautions for their health, safety and well-being, while continuing to render a professional service of a high standard.

5.2 Social service professionals should keep up to date with announcements published in the Government Gazette regarding COVID-19 and the stipulations related to the period of the nation-wide lockdown.

5.3 The SACSSP recommends the following for all social service practitioners:

5.3.1 *Evidence based practice*

- (a) Gain information on COVID-19 and the measures that you need to employ to protect yourself, your family, your colleagues and the clients/communities that you serve.
- (b) Ensure that the information that you have is correct and obtained from credible sources (see paragraph X and Council's website). Every effort should be made to counter misinformation and fake news.

5.3.2 **Responsive services**

- (a) Ensure that you know who are most vulnerable and at risk to ensure that they are supported.
- (b) Let all your clients know about alternative arrangements, if any, during this time, without letting them feel that they do not have access to any services. These may include telephonic counselling, contact via WhatsApp or SMS.
- (c) The use of personal telephone numbers and/or email addresses to contact clients and their families are not encouraged. It is recommended that employers ensure that social service professionals who are required to be in contact with clients have access to resources that enable them to do so, e.g. rotation or scheduling of use of mobile phones.
- (d) If you work in a residential care service such as a child and youth care centre, old age home, rehabilitation centre, residential care facilities for persons with disabilities, shelters, hospitals, hostels, or similar, take additional precautions, while continuing to provide a service. Always ensure that the residents are informed and know how service delivery will be maintained.
- (e) Where members of families are not together for statutory care or other practical reasons, help them to make contact (via telephone, WhatsApp or similar) for assurance that their family members are fine. If such a member of the family is infected with the COVID-19, keep the family members informed remotely.
- (f) Assist those specific groups that may not be able to access the general public information regarding COVID-19 has accessible information. These include children, people who are hearing or visually impaired, people with cognitive and/or intellectual disabilities, refugees, people (including children), living and working on the streets, among others.
- (g) Participate in multi-disciplinary teams and responses so as to ensure that the rights of clients are protected and that psychosocial support services are provided.
- (h) Postpone group work and community meetings until the period of the nation-wide lockdown has ended and the continuation of such activities are safe.

5.3.3 **Professional supervision**

- (a) The continuation of professional supervision is strongly encouraged during this time in particularly as social service professionals are facing a new uncharted territory in their profession.
- (b) Social auxiliary workers and child and youth care workers registered in the auxiliary category who continue to provide services during this period still need supervisory guidance of a social worker or child and youth care worker registered on the professional category as prescribed in the respective regulations.
- (c) The use of teleconferences, Skype or Zoom for supervision and group supervision are encouraged.

- (d) Regular group supervision using the methods described above are encouraged as it will be beneficial for practitioners to share experiences and new approaches that emerge from this unique situation. Share ideas on how to manage and practice in innovative ways with your colleagues and create good practice.

5.3.4 **Students in social work and child and youth care work**

- (a) The SACSSP recommends that the practicum or field instruction of students in social work and child and youth care work, whether at professional or auxiliary level, other than for students in the final year of study, be suspended until such time that the circumstances have normalised.
- (b) The SACSSP recommends that training institutions and practice placement organisation engage in consultations regarding the continued practicums and field instructions of students in social work and child and youth care work be suspended for the period of the nation-wide lockdown for 21 days and that alternative arrangements be made for the accumulation of practicum hours after the situation has normalised.

5.3.4 **Advocacy and awareness raising**

- (a) Advocate and work together with other professionals for the participation of communities in the development of local plans and protocols.
- (b) Advocate with and support your employer to continue to provide quality and timely essential services to all in need of such services
- (c) Educate clients and communities on the prevention and protection measures (see resource links in paragraph X at end of the General Notice). This is critical to help with containment of the virus.
- (d) Raise awareness amongst all involved on the impact of self-isolation, quarantine and on people's social and emotional well-being. Affective disorders (e.g. Anxiety, fear and other negative emotions) may be more prominent during this time and need to be addressed through prevention and response programmes.

5.3.5 **Universal Precautions**

- (a) Adhere to the basic precautions as indicated in paragraph 2.
- (b) The World Health Organisation (WHO) does not recommend the wearing of rubber gloves as a precautionary measure as a person can still pick up COVID-19 while wearing gloves (when you touch your face). The WHO indicates that regularly washing your bare hands with running water and soap provides more protection than wearing rubber gloves. If a person wears rubber gloves, he or she still needs to adhere to all the precautionary measures.
- (c) The World Health Organisation recommends that you do not need to wear a mask if you are healthy. It recommends that you only need to wear a mask if you are taking care of a person with suspected COVID-19 infection or if you are coughing or sneezing. Further, the WHO indicates that if you wear a mask you must know how to use it and dispose of it properly, and that masks are effective only when used in combination with frequent hand-cleaning with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water. See paragraph X for more information.

5.3.6 **Self-care**

- (a) Self-care is important during these times. Your family and your clients need you to keep healthy and be well-rested.
- (b) Make sure that you get enough rest.
- (c) While providing essential services, it is equally important to spend time with your family.

6. Professional ethics

- 6.1 All social service professionals registered with the SACSSP are required to adhere to the professional code of ethics applicable to his or her profession. These codes of ethics apply notwithstanding the period of national disaster and the enforcement of a nation-wide lockdown for 21 days.
- 6.2 The SACSSP recognises that this is an extraordinary period with unique challenges for the professions. Social service professionals need guidance and protection as they explore new territories of working using alternative formats including technology.
- 6.3 Supervisors should provide guidance and support to help social service professionals to deal with new ethical dilemmas.
- 6.4 Employers need to assist through adaptation of policies to accommodate new ways of working, without compromising ethical standards.
- 6.5 Any ethics related questions may also be sent to the SACSSP at the following address only:
regofficer@sacssp.co.za

7. Private Practice

- 7.1 Social service professionals in private practice need to ensure that they abide by the requirements associated with the period of national disaster and the enforcement of a nation-wide lockdown for 21 days.
- 7.2 Services provided through private practice that are not essential, should be suspended or adapted (see paragraph 5) until such time the circumstances have normalised.

8. Sources of information

- 8.1 Social service professionals are encouraged to consult some of the following websites for more accurate information on the COVID-19 coronavirus:

GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH AFRICA webpage on COVID-19
<https://www.gov.za/NovelCoronavirus>

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNICABLE DISEASES (NICD) webpage
<http://www.nicd.ac.za/>

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
<https://sacoronavirus.co.za/>

WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION webpage on COVID-19
<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

Wearing of gloves and masks

<https://www.who.int/images/default-source/health-topics/coronavirus/wearing-gloves.png>

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>

The workplace and COVID-19

https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf?sfvrsn=359a81e7_6

UNICEF's webpage on COVID-19
<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19>

Online quiz: *Fact or fiction: How much do you know about the coronavirus disease (COVID-19)?*

<https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/fact-or-fiction-how-much-do-you-actually-know-about-coronavirus-covid-19>

Social Service Workers Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19

<http://socialserviceworkforce.org/resources/blog/social-service-workers-mitigating-impact-covid-19>

Ethical Exceptions for Social Workers in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Physical Distancing

<https://www.socialworker.com/feature-articles/ethics-articles/ethical-exceptions-social-workers-in-light-of-covid-19-pandemic-physical-distancing/>

International Federation for Social Workers webpage on COVID-19

<https://www.ifsw.org/>

<https://www.ifsw.org/updated-information-on-ifsw-and-the-covid-19-virus/>

Psychological interventions for people affected by the COVID-19 epidemic

<https://app.mhpss.net/?get=354/psychological-interventions-for-people-affected-by-the.pdf>

Addressing Mental Health and Psychosocial during the COVID-19 Outbreak

<https://www.mhinnovation.net/resources/addressing-mental-health-and-psychosocial-during-covid-19-outbreak>

United States National Association of Social Workers (NASW) webpage on COVID-19

<https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Infectious-Diseases/Coronavirus>

- 8.2 More resources will be uploaded on the SACSSP website (www.sacssp.co.za).
9. The South African Council for Social Service Professions, the Professional Board for Social Work, Professional Board for Child and Youth Care Work and staff wishes to express their sincerest appreciation for the role that social service professionals are going to play during the lockdown period, protecting the rights of all people as part of the core professional groups that responds to COVID-19.

ISSUED BY: REGISTRAR, Ms Langi LC Malamba