

SUPERVISION STANDARDS

# Policy and guidelines for the practice of supervision

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1. Introduction

Professional supervision is central to the maintenance of best practice. The Supervision Standards articulates the purpose, functions and values of professional supervision for EveryMan staff in order to:

* provide a guide for good practice in professional supervision relevant to staff, coordinators and managers in a range of roles and organisational settings;
* outline the modes and processes of supervision EveryMan considers acceptable;
* specify the requirements and responsibilities of participants in supervision.

# Definition

Professional supervision is defined as a forum for reflection and learning, a structured and intentional conversation between at least two people, one of whom is a supervisor. This conversation is intentional in that it is a means to ensuring that staff have an opportunity for reviewing, reflecting, considering and support which informs and empowers them in their work and in their membership of our organisation.

Supervision is a professional activity in which practitioners are engaged throughout the duration of their employment with EveryMan regardless of experience or qualification. The participants are accountable to professional standards and defined competencies and to organisational policy and procedures. EveryMan is accountable to participants for ensuring that supervision meets standards and is a genuine means to quality improvement in service delivery, employment conditions and operational effectiveness.

# Purpose of supervision

Active participation in professional supervision is a core practice standard for staff. Professional supervision makes an important contribution toward:

* strengthening the capacities of staff to achieve positive outcomes for EveryMan service users, and for their partners, families, workplaces and other communities
* enhancing the capacities of staff to respond effectively to complex practice presentations;
* retaining staff by supporting and resourcing them to provide quality, ethical and accountable services in line with EveryMan’s vision and values.

# Core values guiding supervision

Supervision is an aspect of professional practice and, as such, all staff are required to meet their ethical responsibilities when engaging in supervisory processes. Three core values underlie the processes of professional supervision. These are:

* 1. Respect for persons – This value relates to the nature of supervisory relationships and in the manner in which client issues and workplace relationships are addressed in supervision. In particular, efforts should be made to understand different viewpoints.
  2. Social Justice – As a core obligation, particularly for staff who are practitioners, social justice principles should guide content, choices, processes and goals of supervision, with special regard for those who are vulnerable, disadvantaged or oppressed.
  3. Professional Integrity – The principles of honesty, transparency, reliability, empathy, reflective self- awareness, discernment, competence and commitment are expected to underlie professional supervision relationships and processes. Professional supervision is part of each and every staff member’s ongoing responsibility for the quality of practice performance.

# Functions of supervision

The three broad components of supervision are referred to here as Education, Support and Accountability.

* 1. Education – Attention is focused on developing practice based knowledge, understanding and skills that will improve the competence and the professional satisfaction of staff. Education in supervision entails a facilitated process of exploration and critical reflection on practice aimed at better staff understanding of the people they work with (clients and other staff), themselves as practitioners, the impact they have and the knowledge, theories, values and perspectives that can be applied to enhance the quality and outcomes of their practice. It entails both self-reflection and critical analysis as staff examine dynamics and interactions at the interpersonal level as well as the broader impact of policy and structures in society. Implications for practice are drawn from the new knowledge and understanding, which can be monitored and enhanced over time through the supervisory relationship.
  2. Support – Recognition is given to the personal impact that front line work can have on practitioners. Supervision is a space where staff can become more aware of how their work is affecting them and, in turn, how their personal reactions and emotional state are impacting on practice. Strategies to deal with such reactions and for self-care are identified. Supervision is a place for encouragement and validation, working through personal-professional boundaries and recognition of circumstances when external personal assistance may be needed.
  3. Accountability – Attention is focused on standards for practice, including accountability for client outcomes, and accountability, responsibility and authority for workplace matters which may be impacting:
* quality of service delivery
* staff participation and wellbeing
* compliance with funding agreements, EM policy, legislation
* making and communicating decisions
* managing staff performance and conduct matters
* reputational or other risk to EveryMan

Supervision is a forum for reviewing practice alongside EveryMan’s policies, procedures and ethical and practice standards. As a forum, supervision is intended to support staff with compliance with work area and organisational policy and procedure requirements. Supervision assists to clarify the role and responsibilities of the staff in their particular work context. Linked to accountability are administrative activities such as managing workload for effective outcomes and attending to record keeping practice, including management and documentation of case planning and other client records, incident reporting, timesheets and leave management.

This function of supervision focuses largely on the organisational context of practice, but it also relates to the broader professional, organisational, sectoral, political and legislative context of the field of practice with which staff are expected to engage. In all circumstances, the goal of supervision is to ensure that the purpose, functions and standards of supervision are achieved. Communication and coordination mechanisms between the parties involved in the supervisory arrangements may be required in order to facilitate this.

# Supervisory arrangements

The types of supervisory arrangements in place will reflect the nature of practice/services, type of team (e.g. multi-disciplinary), access to experienced staff and priority given to professional supervision in these settings, as well as the needs of individual staff. Staff move between roles of supervisor and supervisee with different people, or with the same people when engaging in a peer supervision arrangement (e.g. team meetings). Supervisory arrangements are set in place by management in recognition of the role that professional supervision plays in achieving quality service outcomes.

Balanced attention to the three functions of supervision outlined above (education, support and accountability) is the guiding principle in assessing the adequacy of the supervisory arrangements in fulfilling the purpose of supervision. In addition, attention should be paid to implementing a supervision process that supports critical reflection on practice and professional growth. Attendance at staff meetings, informal de- briefing, in-service training, workshops and seminars, while constituting valuable sources of professional development, are not substitutes for professional supervision.

* Supervisory arrangements meet the Supervision Standards if they address the purpose, functions, standards and requirements of professional supervision. These supervisory arrangements can include:
* The Senior Manager also being the professional supervisor and addressing all supervisory functions.
* Supervisory functions being split between a Coordinator (or Senior Manager) manager who focuses largely on organisational accountability and another who focuses on the field of practice.
* Group supervision, where a supervisor facilitates a supervisory forum with a group of staff or a multi- disciplinary group. Participants benefit from both the collaborative contributions of the group members as well as the guidance of the supervisor, who also requires skills in working with group dynamics.
* Peer supervision, where a collaborative learning and supervisory forum is established by two or more professional colleagues (social work or multi-disciplinary) of equal standing. Within such a forum, participants move between the roles of supervisor, supervisee and collaborative learner.

Each of these arrangements has strengths, challenges and ambiguities associated with EveryMan’s work areas, and all participants in the supervision session need to be responsive to emerging tensions, to review and to negotiate for the best outcomes. Commonly, these tensions relate to focusing too heavily on one supervision function at the expense of others, or the supervisor having limited authority in addressing emerging issues. For example, too much attention to emotional support may be at the expense of the personal challenges required for professional growth; or too much focus on administration and accountability in the form of performance management may jeopardise the formation of a trusting and supported relationship required to embark on processes of critical self-reflection and professional development.

Where the full responsibility for supervision rests with a line manager, issues related to power dynamics, surveillance and control may present as concerns within the supervisory relationship, if they are not appropriately acknowledged and managed. Splitting the supervisory functions can also create challenges if there is inadequate communication and coordination between the different supervisory arrangements.

While external supervision can offer benefits associated with stepping outside an organisational setting to reflect on practice, external supervision is removed from the organisation’s formal management and accountability processes that manage work skills development, performance management and grievances.

# Supervisory processes

The quality of the supervisory relationship is fundamental. The establishment of trust and respect opens space for a safe and supported environment where the challenges of critical self-reflection and professional growth can occur. Power dynamics, expectations, roles and responsibilities all require exploration and agreement at the outset of a supervisory relationship. Positive engagement and negotiation of a supervision contract or agreement in the beginning phase of the supervisory relationship forms the basis for future work.

Both the supervisor and supervisee have responsibilities in supervision and it is an EveryMan practice standard that staff actively seek opportunities:

* for feedback, mentoring, support and constructive criticism in order to continuously improve practice
* to communicate about matters of concern or ask questions about the work area and the wider organisation with a view to contributing to an environment of continuous quality improvement to the benefit of service users and EveryMan employees.

Supervision should allow explorations of particular events or issues of concern encountered by staff in practice, but may also include practices and ideas that extend the staff beyond their experience of standard practice. It is expected that supervision also provide a forum where staff can engage in reflection on their use of self and the skills of social work practice. Professional supervision should provide a safe space for staff to report on their practice, be challenged and extended and to be supported and affirmed.

Informal, ‘in the moment’ supervision can be an effective way to develop practice insights as it works with the heightened awareness and experiential engagement with the issues at the time. This should, however, be balanced with formal, scheduled supervision that allows for more holistic planning and reflection in a place and time that is dedicated for that purpose.

# Standards for the supervision of staff

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| STANDARD | INDICATORS |
| 8.1 Supervisors uphold their professional ethical responsibilities when engaging in the supervisory relationship. | 1. Supervisors model and ensure clear professional boundaries with supervisees. 2. Supervisors avoid supervision of practitioners where close personal or other relationships are contemplated or have existed. When no other supervisor is available, potential conflicts of interest should be declared to the CEO and boundaries negotiated. 3. Supervisors maintain the confidentiality of the supervisees, including client and organisational information discussed in supervision, unless circumstances arise which limit such confidentiality. 4. Supervisors negotiate with supervisees and management in the employing organisation on limits to confidentiality that will exist in the supervisory relationship, in line with requirements in EveryMan policy and in legislation. Some reporting on the process, issues and outcomes of supervision may be an organisational requirement. |
| 8.2 Supervisors establish a supervision contract or agreement and maintain a record of supervision maintained for the duration of the supervisory relationship. | 1. A supervision contract/agreement is negotiated between supervisor and supervisee, and management in the employing organisation if appropriate, and finalised/documented within the first three supervision sessions. 2. External supervisors have a contract when engaged by the employing body prior to the commencement of supervision. This contract may be separate from the agreement with the supervisee. 3. A supervision contract / agreement outlines:    * Purpose, goals and functions;    * Roles, responsibilities and conduct of participants;    * Frequency and duration of supervision;    * How the sessions will be recorded, where records will be stored, who will have access to these records and if/how they will be disposed of;    * How confidentiality and privacy will be managed and what the limits are to this;    * Reporting responsibilities    * How difference of opinion and conflict will be managed; 4. Supervisors maintain records and report on supervision as agreed in the contract and in line with legal and ethical requirements. |
| 8.3 Supervisors are appropriately experienced to provide supervision and demonstrate a commitment to professional practice and currency of knowledge. | Supervisors:   1. have training and experience relevant to the field of practice of the supervisee and bring a range of skills to assist others in their learning. 2. understand the contemporary professional and practice issues, legislation and policy relating to the supervisee’s field of practice. 3. participate in supervisor training provided by EveryMan. 4. engage in their own supervision which addresses their practice of supervision. 5. ensure that supervision sessions are scheduled and that they attend all sessions scheduled with their supervisees. |
| 8.4 Supervisors manage the dynamics of a supervisory relationship appropriately | 1. Supervisors remain aware of the power differential within a supervisory relationship and manage this in an honest and respectful way by encouraging contributions from supervisees within a supportive and trusting relationship. 2. A time and place that is free of interruptions is set aside for supervision. 3. Supervisors manage and work to resolve any conflict that might arise in the supervisory relationship or group. 4. In group supervisory arrangements, supervisors manage group dynamics to facilitate the contributions and constructive outcomes for all participants. |
| 8.5 Supervisors facilitate a process designed to achieve the purpose and functions of supervision, as outlined in the Supervision Standards. | 1. Supervisors are required to: 2. work with supervisees to identify learning needs and professional goals and how these may be addressed through supervision or beyond. 3. facilitate a learning process that supports practitioners to critically reflect on their practice, identify ways to enhance their positive impact for service users (including through the application of research findings and theoretical perspectives) and work through ethical/practice issues or dilemmas. 4. encourage supervisees to discuss work/practice issues of concern, offering support and guidance to resolve these issues. 5. ensure that staff experience their concerns being heard, understood, taken seriously and given a professional response. 6. assist supervisees to identify circumstances when external assistance with personal matters may be required, when these matters interfere with work practice. |

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|  | 1. work with supervisees to understand their practice within the broader goals and context of their employing organisation, field of practice and policy, legislative, social, economic and political environment. 2. engage with supervisees to examine their roles and responsibilities, accountability to service users and employing organisation and how this may be enhanced. 3. recognise cultural influences on practice and the diversity of knowledge and meanings that supervisees bring, collaborating with supervisees to access culturally relevant supervisory arrangements that serve to strengthen practice from cultural perspectives. 4. engage with supervisees to evaluate agreed learning goals as outlined in the supervision agreement/contract and adjust approach if required. |
| 8.6 Supervisors manage any suspected or actual misconduct or unethical behaviour of supervisees in line with ethical responsibilities outlined in the OP&P. | 1. When occurrences of misconduct or unethical practice are reported to, identified or suspected by supervisors they should raise these matters in the first instance with supervisees, where appropriate, to seek a resolution. 2. Where it is not appropriate to raise the issue directly with the supervisee, or if the issue is not resolved after discussion with the supervisee, supervisors will report to the CEO and Senior Manager for guidance or direction. 3. Management of any concerns about misconduct or unethical practice is to be strictly in accordance with relevant OP&P guidelines, particularly in relation to ensuring process is subject to principles of natural justice. 4. To ensure probity and safety for participants when discussing performance or misconduct concerns, supervisors must discuss with CEO or Senior Manager whether a third person should be present. 5. Supervisors are expected to use their own professional supervision to determine their capacity for suitably skilled management of discussions about conduct matters. |
| 9 Standards for staff engaging in supervision  This section of the Supervision Standards is relevant to all staff. | |
| STANDARD | INDICATORS |
| 9.1 Staff maintain their professional ethical responsibilities when engaging in the supervisory relationship. | Staff will ensure that when participating in individual, group or peer supervision:   1. they maintain the confidentiality and privacy of their colleagues, peers and clients, except where legislation requires otherwise 2. discussions, presentations and records are subject to EveryMan privacy and confidentiality policies and guidelines 3. informed consent to discuss information has been provided by the client 4. that clear professional boundaries are maintained at all times 5. they remain open to respectful constructive comment on their practice or behaviour |
| 9.2 Staff actively participate in the supervisory process | Staff are required to:   1. attend supervision within their area of practice with their identified supervisor 2. seek out such supervision when it is not in place 3. attend all scheduled supervision meetings 4. seek and respond openly to feedback and actively contribute to the agenda for supervision sessions. 5. plan and come prepared for supervision sessions by preparing materials relating to practice or organisational matters 6. alert their supervisor, Senior Manager or CEO when the supervisee believes that the   Supervision Standards or their learning needs are not being met. |
| 9.3  Staff take an active role in establishing supervisory processes that meet their needs | Staff :   1. contribute to the maintenance of the supervisory relationship and use supervision to critically reflect on their practice. 2. identify learning and professional development needs, set work and career goals and plan for how these needs and goals will be addressed. 3. use supervision to review work load, responsibilities and skills, accountability and organisational requirements in their practice and discuss. 4. reflect on their relationship with their organisation, field of practice and profession, identifying how their role relates to broader goals, standards, legislation, policies and ways to engage more fully with these requirements. 5. identify the need for cultural supervision and take steps to implement particular supervisory arrangements that could strengthen practice from cultural perspectives |