

Canadian Association of Social Workers

Development of the Code



Context

Several key factors in Canadian society emanating from both historical and contemporary social justice issues impacted the development of the 2023 Code.

In 2008 the federal government apologized for their role in the residential school system and acknowledged the resulting intergenerational trauma that led to several reports and laws of significance that have impacts for social work education, advocacy, and practice.

- **2015:** The Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Report (TRC) and 94 Calls to Action.
- **2019:** Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls & Supplemental Report: Quebec.
- **2019:** Canadian Association of Social Workers Statement of Apology and Commitment to Reconciliation.
- **2019:** *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families*¹.
- **2021:** *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*².

The Development Journey

In 2018 the CASW Board established a federation committee to review and revise the CASW Code of Ethics, Guidelines for Ethical Practice (2005) and Scope of Practice (2008) with a commitment to upholding the ten principles of the TRC Commission.

In the initial phase of the project (November 2018 to April 2020), CASW engaged a consulting firm to facilitate a national consultation process that included interviews with subject matter experts and focus groups with Indigenous stakeholders to seek insights as to how the Code impacted their experiences with the profession and gather their perspectives on what revisions were necessary to reflect contemporary issues and to honour the principles of Truth and Reconciliation. A national membership on-line survey was launched in early 2020. While some of the consultation activities were successfully completed, all in-person consultations were put on hold in early 2020 because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 world pandemic and the project was subsequently paused to allow CASW and partners to focus on Pandemic-related priorities.

In Spring 2021, CASW contracted with a second consulting firm and the Code of Ethics project resumed by using video conferencing methods to support consultations.

¹ Government of Canada. (2020). *An Act Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, S.C. 2019, c. 24. Retrieved from Laws Website Home Consolidated Acts <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/F-11.73/page-1.html>

² Government of Canada. (2021). *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* S.C. 2021, c. 14. Retrieved from Justice Laws Website

The first version of a revised Code of Ethics (herein, the 'Code') was informed by literature and jurisdictional reviews, focus groups with subject matter experts, and data from an online survey of CASW membership completed in early 2020. Input on the first draft was sought from social workers across the nation through a second online survey in French and English and through focus groups.

Partner organizations promoted focus groups for their membership and other focus groups engaged diverse social workers who identified as Indigenous, Francophone or Black. Additionally, social workers who identified as First Nation, Inuit, Métis, racially marginalized, members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, or having intersecting identities participated in focus groups and reviewed the Code. Over 1,092 members participated in consultations and their feedback informed draft 2 which was subsequently reviewed by the Federation Code Committee, Partner Organizations, and key informant stakeholders. In total through three phases of consultation over 1,100 social workers and 238 service users contributed to the development of the Code. The final version was approved by the Federation in June 2023.

Incidents in Society that Affected the Development of the Code

The development of the Code occurred over a period when there was social upheaval in many sectors of Canadian society.

- **2020:** World Pandemic, highlighted gaps in health care, mental health, and adequate care for vulnerable populations.
- **2020:** Significant events of systemic racism and gun violence and corresponding social justice movements in Canada including Black Lives Matter.
- **2021:** Discovery of unmarked graves located near Residential Schools across Canada.
- **2022:** A historic \$40 billion settlement in principle to compensate First Nations children harmed by underfunding of child welfare was announced by Ottawa and subsequently overturned by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal due to some children being left out.
- **2022:** Significant incidents of domestic terrorism and hate motivating crimes towards Indigenous, Muslim, Chinese, Asian, and the 2SLGBTQI+ communities.
- **2022 & 2023:** Unprecedented wildfires, drought, floods and other weather events exacerbated by climate change.

It is within this social context that the Code was drafted and then reviewed by social workers working in roles across the full Scope of Practice. The current times underscores social worker's ethical responsibilities to respect and uphold the dignity and worth of all people, advocate for social justice and elimination of discrimination toward all people, undertake the personal journey of knowledge, truth and reconciliation with Indigenous people, commit to continually developing cultural competence and humility, act with honest and integrity in their practice, continually develop and nurture working relationships with service users and colleagues, protect confidentiality and strive to provide competent social work services.