

SOCIAL WORKERS AND **DISABILITY**

10 Key Points



Ordine degli
Assistenti
Sociali

Consiglio
Nazionale



*" Social workers recognize the central importance and uniqueness of the person in every intervention. They also consider everyone from a biological, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual point of view, in relation to their life and relationship context."**

**Code of Ethics for Social Workers*

In this summary of ten key points, we identify the essential elements that, as social workers, we believe are crucial for developing services that empower persons with disabilities to live inclusively alongside others and ensure the effective implementation of the rights established in national and international law.

Starting in 2025, the Disability Reform established by Law 227/2021 and Legislative Decree No. 62 of May 3, 2024, will come into effect. This Reform aims to implement the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, changing the approach to disability policies and inclusion interventions in our country. Our engagement with this new system will be essential, especially considering our roles in both public and private social, socio-healthcare, and health services.

1. FROM ASSISTANCE TO RIGHTS

Move beyond the traditional assistance-based approach and recognize individuals with disabilities as active participants in planning their interventions and support. Social workers renounce decision-making power, adopting an anti-oppressive approach and focus on providing services that meet the person's wishes and expectations.

2. LIFE PLAN: ESSENTIAL LEVELS OF CARE

A personalized, individualized, and participatory life plan is recognized as a right, equivalent to other rights outlined by the Essential Levels of Care (LEA). Social workers, in collaboration with other professionals, assist persons with disabilities in expressing their choices and determining the support needed to overcome barriers in daily activities.

3. ASSESSMENT WITH THE PERSON, NOT OF THE PERSON

Everyone is the best expert in their own life and has the right to be involved in decisions that concern them. Therefore, persons with disabilities and their families, when present and engaged, must actively participate in the Multidimensional Assessment (VMD), which is key to creating the life plan. Social workers play a crucial role within the VMD team, contributing to an integrated assessment of bio-psycho-social needs, and helping the person shape a new narrative for their life.

4. INTEGRATION: HEALTH, FAMILY, WORK, INNOVATION...

The transformation of health and social care recognizes that no single part of the system can deliver effectively in isolation. Greater integration of services is required. This shift in perspective will only succeed if disability policies are aligned with those related to health, family, education, training, work, innovation, research, housing, and urban and architectural accessibility. Social workers play a key role in integration, working across health and social care systems to connect services and ensure inclusive, comprehensive support.

5. PARTICIPATION AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Synergy among various actors in life communities – associations, civil society, public entities, and Third Sector organizations – along with persons with disabilities and their families, is essential for developing an innovative, inclusive, and community-oriented welfare system built on shared responsibility. The role of social workers is crucial in fostering this synergy.

6. EQUITY AND RESOURCES

Regional disparities in resources and services prevent the full inclusion of persons with disabilities. A unified national-level disability fund is needed, incorporating the financial resources currently allocated for social care and socio-health interventions. At the local level, project-specific budgeting is essential.

7. ACCESS FOR ALL

Gyms, beaches, clubs, offices... We must move beyond the notion that special places are needed for persons with disabilities and instead promote the idea that every living space should be accessible to all. Social workers strive to ensure that everyone is offered authentic and real opportunities.

8. THE CHALLENGES FOR OUR PROFESSION

Two essential challenges: abandoning the performance-based logic and adopting an anti-oppressive approach. While established practices may still influence us, it is critical to co-design and plan interventions with persons with disabilities, recognizing them as experts on their own lives. This is key to promoting independent living and playing an active role in the ongoing Disability Reform.

9. CHANGING SERVICES, LET'S WORK TOGETHER!

A profound rethink of residential, semi-residential, and home care service models is necessary, currently constrained by predetermined requirements and standards. We must allow for flexibility in attendance and access methods inherent in real life projects. Social workers collaborate in various contexts to promote this change.

10. NEW COMPETENCIES, SPECIFIC EDUCATION

Citizens have the right to access professionals and services capable of addressing increasingly complex needs. It is the responsibility of the state and the professions to ensure this. Investing in continuous interdisciplinary, and intradisciplinary education is essential, as is redesigning university curricula for entry into the profession and ensuring supervision.

October 2024