

Use of Artificial Intelligence in Social Work

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an evolving technology that could have a significant impact on social work practice and service participants. The use of AI has demonstrated efficiencies and innovation, and the Manitoba College of Social Workers (MCSW) appreciates that AI is considered a tool to facilitate social work services.

When used appropriately, AI can potentially augment social work practices. However, AI technology is not a substitute for the foundation of social work practice and should never replace human judgement and critical thinking. AI generated information requires review as it lacks personalization, analysis, tone, and accuracy and one cannot generally confirm sources of evidence. AI systems are trained on existing data which can contain biases. Social Workers must be vigilant in identifying and addressing biases. While AI can process vast amounts of data quickly, it may miss the subtle nuances of lived experiences that are crucial to social work. Social work is a human-centred profession which AI systems might oversimplify or misinterpret.

Therefore,

1. AI technology must never replace relationship-based social work practice and decision making.
2. Social Workers must critically evaluate AI-generated material and always supplement it with professional judgment and sound ethical principles.
3. Any technology facilitated services must be developed and approved by the Social Worker and shall not be the sole product of AI technology.

Social Worker Responsibilities:

Social Workers are ethically obligated to understand, adhere to, and remain current on changes to the use of technology. Social Workers must adhere to all professional ethics, standards, statutes, and Agency rules regarding the use of technology in their social work practice.

Frederic G. Reamer, Ph.D., discusses critical ethical issues to consider when using AI in social work. The issues Reamer identifies include informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, transparency, plagiarism and dishonesty, algorithmic bias, and ensuring evidence-based tools are being used (2023).

MCSW encourages Social Workers to review the Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice and Standards of Technology at least annually and when facing a particular issue or dilemma.

Foundational Principles:

- **Relationship:** The professional relationship is a basic and essential component of social work practice. Social Workers uphold the interests of service participants as their primary concern and minimize risks.
- **Self Determination:** The social work process ensures that service participants are involved in developing their goals and objectives. AI-generated material could impact client autonomy.

- **Evidence Informed:** The social work process is grounded in and draws on recognized theories of the social sciences, as well as specialized knowledge in many different social work fields of practice. It is important to review information provided by AI-driven apps carefully. Social Workers are responsible for the information they offer, and the assessment, intervention, services provided to service participants. Social Workers should be prepared to cite their sources.
- **Informed Consent:** The use of technology, including specific use and risks related to each type of technology, should be incorporated as a part of informed consent. Social Workers should disclose early in the relationship how or when AI is used in their practice and obtain written consent.
- **Client Confidentiality:** Confidentiality is critical to professional and ethical practice and Social Workers must not enter client information into any AI tools. There are potential risks to consider when using technology. Be mindful in your use of generative AI systems, as such apps may allow for others to access and use information that you enter into these apps. Avoid technology that may allow for unauthorized disclosure.
- **Competence:** Social Workers have a responsibility to obtain training, seek consultation and supervision, and develop competence prior to the use of technology.
- **Social Work File Records:** Documentation is critical to ethical care and must be factual and accurate. Social Workers must consider whether signing documentation generated by AI is misleading or otherwise improper. When utilizing technology and/or transcription tools, Social Workers should know where transcriptions are stored, how securely transcriptions are stored, who has access to the transcriptions, and who owns the transcription data. Service participants have a right to know how to access this data.
- **Professional Boundaries:** Social Workers have a role and responsibility to set appropriate boundaries when using technology, including social media, for personal and professional use. If a service participant violates social media boundaries, it is the Social Worker's responsibility to uphold the standards of practice.

Upholding Ethical and Professional Practice:

Social Workers who use AI in their practice are encouraged to reflect on the following:

- Assess, question and never solely rely on the information AI generates. It is recommended that Social Workers take a human-in-the-loop approach to using AI software.
- Always search for errors, bias and false information.
- Review data to ensure it does not contain any confidential information

If using AI-related tools to search and/or generate information, determine if there is a requirement to agree to terms of use that may jeopardize confidential information.

- Consult and obtain relevant supervision and training.
- Obtain relevant liability insurance.
- Be transparent about your use of AI and determine if there has been any copyright infringement, that your use does not violate property rights and that sources of evidence are credited. Keep all notes, draft versions of your work and a record of your interactions with AI tools. These drafts can be used to show how the work was developed, and to provide evidence that the work is authentic.
- If practicing in education or research activities, be sure to review any academic institution's AI policies, field education and/or research procedures to ensure you are not plagiarising and that you are practicing with integrity.

AI technology is only as reliable as the humans who develop it. Bias, errors, and lack of the person-in-environment perspective can result in the development of false and inaccurate information. Social Workers must navigate AI with care, balancing innovation with the profession's core values.

Resources:

Consistent with the Code of Ethics, Social Workers must familiarize themselves with reliable sources of information and build their competency before using AI in their practice.

The following resources are meant to provide further support and guidance to ensure that RSW's are practising ethically and professionally.

[AI and Social Work](#)

[OCSSSW Practice Notes: Professional and Ethical: Communication Technology Practices and Policies for a Digital World](#)

[Practice Notes: Communication Technology and Ethical Practice: Evolving Issues in a Changing Landscape](#)

[Practice Notes: The Evolving Landscape of Electronic Practice](#)

Reamer, Frederic G (2023). Artificial Intelligence in Social Work: Emerging Ethical Issues in *International Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, Volume 20, Issue 2.

Rubin, A., Lynch, M., Sage, T. & Sage, M. (2024, March 29). Navigating AI in Social Work Education. Teaching and Learning in Social Work. <https://laureliversonhitchcock.org/2024/03/29/navigating-ai-in-social-work-education/> Navigating AI in Social Work Education - Teaching & Learning in Social Work

[Standards for Technology in Social Work Practice](#)

[Top 6 Considerations for Virtual Services](#)

[Top 10 Considerations for Using Communication Technology in Practice](#)

[The Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario \(IPC\): Artificial Intelligence in the public sector: Building trust now and for the future](#)

[The Power of ChatGPT and AI for Social Workers: Revolutionizing Practice and Empowering Change! - Agents of Change Webcast](#)

[Transparency for Generative Artificial Intelligence \(AI\) | Wilfrid Laurier University](#)

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Practice Notes provide support and information for Manitoba social workers, employers, and members of the public regarding social work practice issues. These notes offer general guidance only and are not a substitution for legal advice. College members with specific inquiries are invited to consult the College.