



# **Staff Supervision Standards for PDRS Practice**

*A VICSERV Paper*

*April 2004*

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## INTRODUCTION

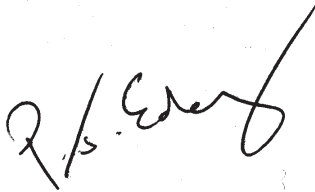
This VICSERV Policy Paper describes and defines a body of staff supervision standards for psychiatric disability rehabilitation and support (PDRS) practice.

The standards, which have been formally endorsed by the VICSERV Committee of Management, apply to the supervision of direct service workers in PDRS programs across Victoria. They are “model” standards in the sense that, while individual PDRS agencies may choose to develop their own particular supervision standards to reflect local requirements, any locally developed standards will reflect a high level of coherence and consistency with the “model” VICSERV standards.

This publication covers

- Staff Supervision Standards for PDRS Practice
- Broader Discussion of the Standards
- Background to the Development of the Standards

I wish to acknowledge the pivotal role of the VICSERV Professional Reference Group in the development of this important work and commend the document to you.



Phil Eddy  
President  
VICSERV Committee of Management

## Section A

### STANDARDS FOR THE SUPERVISION OF DIRECT SERVICE WORKERS IN PDRS PRACTICE

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#### Standard i. Mandatory Agency Supervision

Direct service workers receive and actively participate in *regular, planned* supervision with their agency supervisor. Supervision is a mandatory part of PDRS work. Supervision is designed to serve:

- The Direct Service Worker - supervision helps to provide knowledge, skills and professional development for the worker to do his/her work competently. Supervision should also be a source of encouragement and support to the individual worker.
- The Organization - supervision helps the agency to fulfill its service responsibilities to consumers and funding bodies, and to fulfill its responsibilities, as employer, to guide and support its staff.
- The Consumer or Client - supervision helps to protect the rights and legitimate interests of what is recognized as a highly vulnerable client group. It also helps to promote effective and high quality service for the consumer.

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#### Standard ii. Supervision Components

Supervision of staff includes components of:

- Support - assisting to identify and deal with job related stress and validating staff in their job performance
- Accountability - ensuring the work undertaken is in line with agency standards, policy and values
- Reflection - encouraging staff to take responsibility for the continuous improvement of their work practice
- Education - providing information, coaching, identifying learning needs necessary to undertake work effectively and developing training plan/s accordingly

The emphasis, or balance of time, spent on each of these components may vary from session to session and supervisee to supervisee but over time each component must be considered with equal weight.

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#### Standard iii. Frequency of Agency Supervision

The optimal standard for the frequency and amount of regular, planned supervision for direct service workers is one session of 60 minutes duration per fortnight (or a pro rata arrangement for part-time workers).

This frequency and amount of planned supervision for direct workers may be varied upwards or downwards according to need (e.g. the level of experience and prior training of the worker, the personal needs of the worker, the concerns of the agency, the requirements of the current work situation etc).

## **Standard iv. Supervision Agreement**

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At the establishment of the supervisory relationship, the worker and supervisor jointly develop a supervision agreement (written or oral). This agreement clarifies and commits to a shared understanding of the proposed supervisory process. The agreement is negotiated within the policy parameters of the agency, including the mandated roles and responsibilities of supervisor and worker.

Some of the factors addressed within this agreement include:

- the goals of all parties in the supervisory process
- roles and responsibilities of each party, time, frequency and preferred supervisory methods
- ground rules, including supervision recording, record access and privacy/confidentiality boundaries for supervision

This agreement should be reviewed, updated and refined as required.

## **Standard v. Access to Unplanned Supervision at Short Notice when Required**

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Agency supervisors ensure, as far as is practically possible, access to a system of responsive and skilled support and direction for all direct service workers who may need consultation / informal supervision at short notice.

## **Standard vi. The Recording of Supervision**

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A shared record of planned supervision sessions is made and kept within the agency. At a minimum, the following matters are recorded:

- the participants
- the date and time of the session
- the issues discussed
- agreed actions

In addition to supporting and enhancing the effectiveness of the supervision process itself, these records provide a profile of the pattern of supervision within the agency for quality assurance purposes.

## **Standard vii. Grievance Resolution Mechanism for Supervision**

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All PDRS agencies have in place an accessible grievance resolution mechanism to deal with any issues or problems which may impede the supervision process.

## **Standard viii. Selection, Training and Supervision Expectations for Agency Supervisors**

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The following standards apply to the selection, training and supervision of supervisors in PDRS services.

- *Selection*

Agencies ensure the following skill sets are identified in selection criteria for the first level supervisory positions

- a. PDRS practice skills
- b. staff supervisory skills
- c. broader frontline management/administrative skills.

- *Training*

All persons appointed to supervisory positions complete, as a minimum, a recognised staff supervision training package.

- *Supervision of Supervisor*

Effective supervision is complex work which requires ongoing reflection to maintain and increase competency. All supervisors, therefore, are supported by their organization to undertake regular supervision on their own supervisory practice.

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### **Standard ix. External Supervision**

When, and to the extent that agency resources permit, the opportunity for external supervision for workers, in addition to their agency supervision, may be explored, by the supervisor.

External supervision is seen as being an adjunct to agency supervision - not as taking the place of it.

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### **Standard x. Alternatives to one-on-one Supervision**

Specific methods of supervision are chosen and justified on their effectiveness in meeting the specific goals and purposes of supervision at any time, and on the context of the work practice undertaken.

- *Group Supervision*

In situations where workers share the same clients, tasks and workplace (e.g. residential rehabilitation, certain day program groups), a higher component of group or team supervision may be expected. In a team working with the similar approaches and issues, but in different settings and with different clients (e.g. home-based outreach, individual personal counseling and support), a lesser component of group supervision may be expected.

In discussing group or team supervision in this section, reference is being made specifically to group or team supervision in the broadest sense, not merely group or team administrative meetings.



## Discussion

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### 1. Scope of this Policy Paper on Supervision Standards

These Standards are concerned with supervision for direct service workers. They are standards for PDRS work as a field of direct practice and do not address the supervision needs of administration staff, management staff, volunteers or students within agencies.

The purpose of these Standards is to identify the parameters of a good supervisory framework for practice. They are neither a resource nor a training guide for effective staff supervision. A bibliography of helpful resources, however, is appended for those researching the skills of good supervisory process.

### 2. What is Supervision?

Harries (1987) provides the following operational definition of the term supervision for the type of work we do in the field of social and community services:

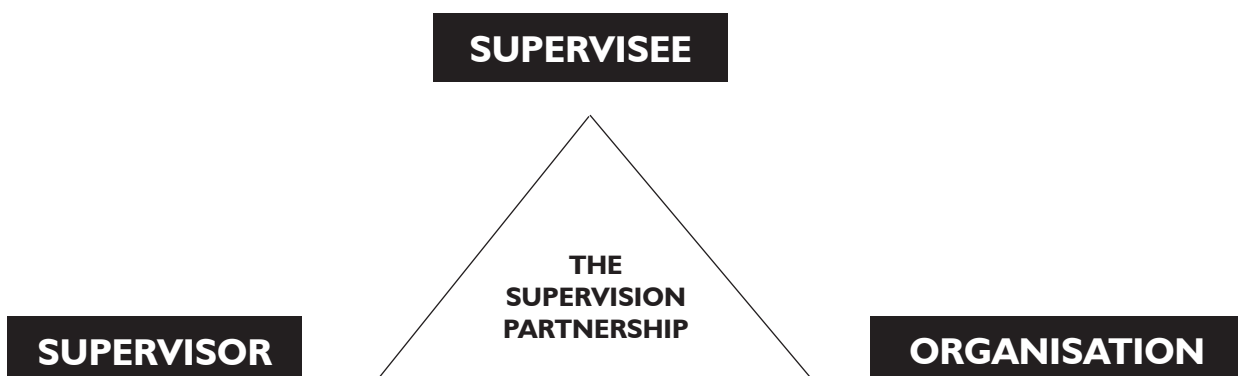
“Supervision is a process in which one worker is given responsibility to work with another worker in order to achieve certain professional, personal and organizational objectives. These objectives include competent, accountable practice, continuing professional development and personal support” (as quoted in Knapman et al. p.4)

Harries’ definition refers to the existence of three parties, all of whom have a vested interest, for different reasons, in the process and the outcomes to the supervisory process. Each of the parties has its own specific roles and responsibilities, and they all work together to achieve common goals.

The three parties are

1. the direct service worker
2. the supervisor
3. the agency providing the service.

Knapman and Morrison point out that supervision is “a partnership between the supervisee, the supervisor and the organization” (p.6) and present the following graphical representation of the “Supervision Partnership”.



### 3. The Rationale for Supervision

Supervision is designed to serve the interests of:

- The Consumer or Client- supervision helps to protect the rights and legitimate interests of what is recognised as a highly vulnerable client group. Supervision also helps to promote effective and high quality service.
- The Direct Service Worker- supervision helps to provide knowledge, skills, professional development for the worker to do his/her work competently. Supervision should also be a source of encouragement and support to the individual worker.
- The Organization- supervision helps the agency to fulfill its service responsibilities and obligations to consumers, and to fulfill its responsibilities as employer to guide and support its staff.

The philosophy of staff supervision is multi-dimensional and encompasses a range of objectives, including:

- high quality and accountable practice,
- a skilled and competent workforce,
- sound industrial relations and job satisfaction,
- a culture of learning through reflective practice,
- effective organizational management and communication, and
- professional and career development.

### 4. The Mandate for Supervision

#### a. PDRS Practice and Staffing Standards Documents (DHS, 2000)

Standard 9, sub-section 16 of the Standards for Psychiatric Disability Support Services (DHS 2000), under which all PDRS services in Victoria operate, stipulates that:

“The PDSS ensures that staff have access to formal and informal supervision” (p. 25).

Other sub-sections of this same Standard 9 also reinforce the importance of supervision by reference to the need for “supporting staff during and after critical incidents” (p.25), for identifying “the training and development needs of (its) staff” (p. 24) and so on.

At a Commonwealth policy level, The National Practice Standards for the Mental Health Workforce (Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing 2002) also underline the role of supervision in mental health practice. For example, under Standard 12, “Ethical Practice and Professional Responsibilities”, mental health professionals are expected to “demonstrate an ability to participate in team supervision, when available, professional supervision and continuing education to maintain and improve the currency and quality of practice” (p. 39).

#### b. The Research Literature on Supervision in the Field of Social and Community Services

Research evidence supports the positive impact of supervision in social and community services work. Kadushin (2002 p. 476-480) reviews a number of empirical studies which lend support to the following:

- Supervision is an important source of satisfaction to workers (Greenleigh Associates, Scott, Galambos and Wiggins, Munson, Webb et al.)

- There is a relationship between satisfaction with supervision and job satisfaction (Staudt, Newsome and Pillari)
- Workers are likely to identify that supervision is helpful for their work (Shapiro, Schroffel)
- Good supervision is correlated with better individual performance, less absenteeism and better agency performance (Olmstead and Christensen)
- The quality of supervision is negatively correlated with anticipated staff turnover (Shinn)
- A close, quality supervisory relationship is correlated with low burnout (Cotter Mena)
- A level of correlation is evident between effective supervision of workers and client satisfaction with the helping relationship and client goal attainment. (Harkness, Harkness and Hensley)

## 5. The Primary Functions of Supervision

Kadushin's (1985) conceptual model of supervision in the context of social and community services has been widely used over the last twenty years. He describes three primary functions as operating in the supervision of direct service workers:

- *Managerial/Administrative/Accountability*

Kadushin defines the managerial function of supervision as ensuring that a worker's job performance is aligned to the values, standards, policy and procedures of the service agency. This function is therefore concerned with the application of legitimate agency authority.

Examples of the managerial function include review of client service plans, interventions and activities, review of client outcomes, clarification of roles and responsibilities, work planning and allocation, workload level and management issues, adherence to agency policies, values and standards in practice and so on.

- *Educative/Professional Development (The Formative Function)*

Kadushin defines the educational function of supervision as "concerned with helping the worker learn what he (she) needs to know in order to do his job effectively." (p.223)

Examples of the educative function include assessment of knowledge, skills and values, exploration of training and development opportunities, "clinical supervision" (See Glossary), reflection on practice, general information and coaching from supervisor, consideration of career and professional progression and so on.

- *Supportive (The Restorative Function)*

Kadushin defines the supportive function of supervision as "concerned with helping the supervisee deal with job-related stress and developing attitudes and feelings conducive to the best job performance." (p. 295) The supportive function of supervision "takes place in the context of a positive relationship characterized by respect, empathic understanding, acceptance ..... and concern for the worker as a person." (p. 273). This particular aspect of supervisory practice has been characterized as "owned by" or "belonging to" the worker or supervisee.

Examples of the supportive function include the ongoing process of building confidence and reducing/preventing stress through listening, encouragement, affirmation, reassurance and structural solutions, debriefing after stressful incidents, sharing responsibility for difficult decisions, promoting worker self care and so on.

- *Balance Between Functions*

For the supervisory partnership to work effectively, there must be a clear understanding (by worker and supervisor) of, and a balance between, the managerial, educative and supportive functions. The critical need for a shared understanding of and balance between these three functions was stressed by many supervisor and worker respondents to the sector questionnaire on Supervision and Ethics. (See Report on the Findings of the PDRS Sector Consultation on Supervision and Ethics 2003).

- *Balance in Content or Focus*

In addition to a balance between functions, staff supervision needs to strike an appropriate balance in content or focus. As would be expected, staff supervision must have a high proportion of client-focused content, in terms of casework reflection on the worker's interventions in relation to the individual consumer's needs and goals. Supervision also needs a strong component of worker-focus, in terms of support, stress reduction and professional development. Other foci or content areas of supervision include organizational, team and program concerns.

## **6. The Supervision Agreement (Contract)**

The development of a supervision agreement (written or verbal) between each worker and his/her supervisor is an essential part of the supervisory process. The development of this agreement takes place largely at the start of the supervisory process but also continues throughout the supervisory relationship as the contract is developed and refined.

The purpose of a supervision agreement is the establishment of a shared understanding or "match" between the individual supervisor and worker on the

- goals
- processes
- tasks
- roles and responsibilities
- ground rules for their supervision process.

Some of the more sensitive ground rules that must be addressed in developing the individual agreement between worker and supervisor, are

- the boundaries of privacy and confidentiality
- supervision recording guidelines
- guidelines on feedback and review of the supervision process itself

Despite the need for flexibility in the development of individual supervision agreements, these agreements must conform to, and fall within the policy of the service agency, including the given roles and responsibilities of the supervisor and the worker.

## **7. Selection, Training and Supervision Expectations for Agency Supervisors**

Across the PDRS sector in Victoria, the typical organizational structure integrates professional and managerial functions at the first supervisory level. Staff supervisory positions, or coordinator positions as they tend to be called across the sector, are pivotal to the effective functioning of PDRS services.

For this reason, appropriate selection criteria, training requirements and ongoing supervision arrangements for supervisors must form part of any set of standards on supervision.

## 8. Responsibility for the Agency Supervision Framework

While the day-to-day work of supervision belongs to coordinators and the workers they supervise, the responsibility for having in place an appropriate agency supervisory system ultimately resides with the governing body and its senior management.

## 9. Glossary of Supervision-Related Terms

### *a. Regular, Planned Supervision versus Unplanned, Short Notice, Supervision Support*

Planned, structured supervision typically occurs on a regular basis at a specified time and place. This type of structured supervision allows for an orderly processing of supervision business. Direct service workers, however, also require access to a system offering impromptu and informal supervision, especially when they must seek experienced advice and support at short notice.

### *b. One-on-One versus Group Supervision*

A supervisor may provide supervision to his/her workers on a “one-on-one” basis or within a group/team setting.

The proportion of “one-on-one” versus “group” supervision is informed by Hawkins and Shohet’s (2002) principle that supervisory methods should ideally reflect the nature and context of the work being supervised. As a general rule, the emphasis of PDRS work is on meeting the needs of the individual consumer on his/her personal journey of recovery. Hence the “one-on-one” supervisory method for workers would receive some prominence.

### *c. External Supervision*

External Supervision refers to the process whereby a worker receives supervision from a professional outside his/her employing agency. External supervision, given that it is supported by agency resources (money and time), needs to be negotiated by the supervisor. Consensus between the supervisor and supervisee needs to be sought on the goals and time lines for the external supervision.

As the mechanisms of agency decision-making and client review are essentially absent from external professional supervision, this form of supervision needs to be seen as being in addition to agency supervision and not as taking the place of it, and is usually limited to the following circumstances:

- i. to address sensitive or confidential work-related issues that the supervisor and/or worker judge as best managed at arm’s length from the organization rather than by the line manager
- ii. to provide the worker with professional discipline-specific supervision not available within the agency. This argument is particularly relevant when discipline-specific supervision is required for worker accreditation purposes.
- iii. to acquire specialist work skill/expertise that may not be available in the agency.

### *d. Peer Support*

Peer support in the PDRS context typically involves a form of reciprocal mentoring between workers of similar status. The emphasis in peer support is on mutuality where workers both give and receive support within the one relationship. Peer support (supervision) can be conducted in either a one-on-one or larger group mode.

As peer support usually lacks a formal decision-making process linking back into the agency authority and client review structures, this form of supervision needs to be seen as an adjunct to agency supervision and not as taking the place of it.

*e. Personal Counseling/Therapy*

Personal Counseling/Therapy are services which may be used by workers to address health/personal issues having detrimental impact on their well-being. Personal counseling and therapy services are accessed by the worker on a confidential basis from outside the employing organization, although agency supervision can sometimes be a vehicle through which health/personal problems emerge and options for referral are mutually explored.

While external supervision may address work-related stress and/or the impact of personal issues on work performance, the focus of external supervision remains on assisting the worker to perform their job effectively and, as such, needs to be differentiated from personal counseling or therapy.

*f. Clinical Supervision*

“Clinical Supervision” is another term regularly used across the range of social and community services. It is a term that tends to have different connotations according to the particular field of practice in which it is used.

Kadushin identifies “clinical supervision” as one component within what he has described as the educational function of supervision. (See Section Five). He states that clinical supervision is concerned with “teaching the knowledge, skills and attitudes” required for clinical work “through the detailed analysis of the worker’s interaction with the client”.

As we noted in Section Five, however, the educational function of supervision can be wider than its “clinical supervision” component.



## Section B

### BACKGROUND TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THESE STANDARDS

#### 1. Context

VICSERV sees its role as one of facilitating leadership and standard-setting within the PDRS sector. It commissioned the developmental work on Staffing Standards as part of its Quality Agenda, which has been outlined in successive VICSERV Strategic Plans (2001-). The general aims of the Staffing Standards Project are:

- To develop and define consistent and high quality staffing standards in the diverse and developing field of PDRS practice.
- To ensure consumers' rights are protected by promoting safe, ethical and effective service delivery
- To resource and support governing bodies, management and staff in PDRS services to fulfill their service goals and obligations.

#### 2. The Professional Reference Group (PRG)

The VICSERV Committee of Management (COM) commissioned the Professional Reference Group to pursue these aims by examining, in particular, the following PDRS workforce matters:

- Supervision
- An Ethical Code
- Work Competencies
- Workforce Training Requirements

The PRG is comprised of a number of senior, experienced workers from the PDRS sector, plus a representative from VICSERV. Furthermore, the PRG invites a Department of Human Services representative to participate in all deliberations and offer the funder perspective.

The members of the PRG are:

- Nicky Bisogni, Chair, (Pahran Mission)
- Ian Hardisty (Inner East Mental Health Services Association)
- Caz Healy (Western Region Community Health Service)
- Loretta Foster (Upper Hume Community Health Centre)
- Malcolm Morgan (Richmond Fellowship of Victoria)
- Michael Clanchy (VICSERV)

Department of Human Services representative Dr Ruth Vine (until December 2003)

### 3. Process

The PRG commenced work on Supervision Standards by distributing a questionnaire on supervision throughout the sector. 178 worker and 60 supervisor respondents provided information both on current supervision patterns and their viewpoints on the strengths and weaknesses of supervision. A detailed report of the findings of this consultation has already been circulated to the sector.

In parallel, the PRG also

- Researched local and international literature pertaining to supervision in the context of social and community service work, including a sample of supervision policies from PDRS agencies in Victoria
- Identified key supervision issues and held focused discussions

The PRG then developed a Draft of Staff Supervision Standards for PDRS practice and circulated it throughout the sector for comment. Comments on the draft were also solicited from the Department of Human Services, the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (peak consumer body) and the Carer Network (peak carer body).

All feedback received from the Consultation Draft was carefully considered and amendments were made.

This final document was then formally endorsed by the VICSERV Committee of Management as representing the 'model' Staff Supervision Standards for PDRS Practice.



## Section C

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