



The South African Association for  
Social Workers in Private Practice

## CLINICAL SOCIAL WORK

“**Clinical Social Work**” is a specialised field in social work that focuses on the assessment, diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental illness, emotional distress and behavioural disorders in adults, adolescents and children. Clinical social work services are provided by specialist social workers who have advanced training and knowledge in mental health and therapeutic modalities.

### **Who benefits from our services?**

- Anybody who is experiencing emotional distress can benefit from the support and expertise of a clinical social worker. The list below is not comprehensive, but gives an idea of the scope of services offered.
- Individuals and families of individuals who suffer from a range of mental health issues including anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and personality disorders. In more severe cases the social worker will work in conjunction with the treating doctor or psychiatrist.
- Individuals, groups and families who have experienced trauma or abuse.
- Individuals and families of individuals who struggle with addictions, substance abuse and eating disorders.
- People adjusting to new life stages and life challenges including, but not restricted to, onset of an illness, divorce or relationship difficulties, fertility issues, loss and bereavement.
- People facing existential or identity issues including gender identity issues.
- Children and families of children who struggle with childhood mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, the emotional and behavioural consequences of ADHD, specific learning difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Disorder.

### **Activities undertaken by Clinical Social workers include:**

- Observing client behaviour, assessing needs and devising treatment strategies.
- Identifying and assessing psychological, behavioural and emotional disorders from a social work perspective.
- Developing and implementing treatment plans.
- Counselling and psychotherapy with individuals, couples, families and groups.
- Consulting with relevant medical professionals (doctors, therapists, etc.) when applicable.
- Administering social service programs.

### **Clinical Social Work scope of practice excludes:**

- Prescribing medication – this is to be done by psychiatrists (who often work together with the clinical social worker).
- Forensic social work which involves preparing reports for court and providing court mandated case management services.
- Psychological tests (such as personality and intelligence tests).
- Nutritional advice in patients with eating disorders – this is to be done by nutritionists (who often work together with the clinical social worker).