

Australian Social Prescribing Link Work Education Standards (AUSP-LW Ed-Standards) February 2026

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About ASPIRE

Our Vision

Sustainable wellbeing where resilient and connected communities uplift and value all Australians.

Our Mission

ASPIRE's mission is to maximise the benefit of social prescribing in Australia's health landscape through targeted research, education, and advocacy. We're supporting people to build an ecosystem where individuals are empowered, communities are strengthened, and the environment is treasured, ensuring that all Australians have access to abundant opportunities, meaningful connections, and holistic wellbeing through evidence-based, sustainable action.

Our Strategy

1. **Build Awareness:** Support national awareness campaigns to elevate the understanding of social prescribing's benefits among our citizens and healthcare professionals. Utilise diverse media channels to reach broad audiences and increase visibility.
2. **Improve Access:** Develop initiatives to improve access to social prescribing services across all Australian communities, focusing on removing barriers in rural and underserved areas. Partner with local organisations to extend service reach.
3. **Scale Practices:** Create scalable models of social prescribing that can be adapted and replicated across different regions. Focus on modular approaches that allow for local customisation without compromising the core elements of service delivery.
4. **Generate Evidence:** Conduct rigorous research to substantiate the benefits and effectiveness of social prescribing. Publish findings to support advocacy and policymaking, ensuring that evidence drives the expansion and enhancement of services. Develop comprehensive data sets that inform ongoing research and policy adjustments.
5. **Support Education:** Collaborate with academic institutions to incorporate social prescribing into curricula and training programs. Develop accreditation standards for training programs to ensure high-quality education for future practitioners. Create comprehensive education standards that set benchmarks for training and professional development.
6. **Develop Workforce:** Implement a national strategy for workforce development that includes career pathways, continuing professional development, and support structures for social prescribing practitioners. Establish mentorship and leadership programs to build expertise and capacity.
7. **Foster Integration:** Enhance integration of social prescribing within the broader healthcare and social service systems to ensure seamless service delivery. Work with healthcare providers, community organisations, and government agencies to create a cohesive network. Develop and refine implementation models that facilitate effective integration of social prescribing practices.
8. **Ensure Sustainability:** Secure long-term funding by demonstrating the cost-effectiveness and health benefits of social prescribing. Engage with philanthropic entities, government bodies, and the private sector to diversify funding streams and create financial models that support sustained operations. Advocate for policies that support the sustainability and growth of social prescribing initiatives.

Foreword

Introduction to the Australian Social Prescribing Link Worker Educational Standards

ASPIRE, as Australia's authoritative body on social prescribing, is dedicated to advancing the practice and understanding of this field to meet the diverse needs of our nation. Operating without a legislated regulatory framework, our primary role is to establish and maintain robust standards that ensure the highest quality of education and practice in social prescribing.

Social prescribing is a means of connecting individuals to non-medical support within the community to improve their health and wellbeing through access to non-medical, local, and community-based opportunities and supports which address the practical, social, and material things that get in the way of wellbeing and quality (1). Central to the understanding of social prescribing is an emphasis on personal agency and co-production, ensuring that individuals are active partners in identifying their needs, shaping the supports they access, and co-designing pathways that reflect their own goals, strengths, and preferences.

This document outlines the standards designed to assist universities and training organisations in developing comprehensive, consistent programs that will prepare a skilled workforce of social prescribing Link Workers across Australia. These standards are crafted to ensure that educational offerings are scalable, adaptable, and aligned with the essential competencies required for effective practice in our diverse and unique context.

Our standards serve several key purposes:

- **Assuring the quality** of education and professional training in social prescribing.
- **Fostering innovation** in care models, responding to emerging health needs.
- **Ensuring the preparedness** of graduates for professional practice across diverse settings.
- **Guiding educational institutions** in upholding high standards of ethical and professional conduct.
- **Promoting continuous improvement** and adaptability in a rapidly evolving healthcare landscape.

Developed through extensive consultation with key partners these standards draw on contemporary best practices and frameworks in related fields. They are tailored to address the specific challenges and opportunities in Australia, including a commitment to incorporating First Nations perspectives and catering to the needs of our diverse populations.

We are committed to regularly reviewing and updating these standards to embrace advancements in knowledge, practice, and community feedback. We encourage all partners including educational institutions, healthcare providers, and policymakers, to actively engage with these standards. This engagement is crucial for developing a skilled and adaptable social prescribing workforce capable of meeting Australia's unique healthcare challenges.

For further details on how these standards apply to Australia's unique geographic and cultural landscape, please refer to the **Introduction** section.

Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all individuals and organisations that have contributed to the development of these Social Prescribing Link Work Education Standards in Australia. This work is a collective endeavour that could not have been accomplished without the collaboration, expertise, and commitment of many.

We recognise the significant contribution of First Nations communities, whose wisdom and Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework have enriched these standards immeasurably. Your perspectives have not only added depth but have fundamentally shaped the way we understand holistic healthcare in Australia.

Acknowledgment is also due to the various healthcare providers, community organisations, and government agencies for their ongoing commitment to multisectoral collaboration in this complex landscape. Your efforts are crucial in adapting social prescribing to Australia's unique geographic and cultural context.

We also acknowledge the technological innovators who are working to improve the platforms that facilitate social prescribing, and the many individuals who have shared their lived experiences, enriching this document with invaluable real-world perspectives.

Lastly, we are grateful to all funding bodies who have enabled the exploration and establishment of various social prescribing models tailored to community-specific needs in Australia.

Introduction

Why Australia Needs Social Prescribing Link Work Standards

An Australian Approach

This section describes both the current realities and the opportunities of social prescribing in Australia. Where elements of the system are working well, we describe them as they are; where we describe a vision of more integrated, consistent, and equitable social prescribing, these represent the goals these standards are designed to help achieve. Social prescribing uses an assets-based approach that seeks to nurture and build individual and community resources. It focuses on promoting health and wellbeing, emphasising factors that support human health rather than those that cause disease. This approach values people's knowledge, skills, connections, and contributions – creating opportunities for people to thrive and communities to flourish (2).

Social prescribing takes a locally adaptive approach to connecting people to resources, taking into account regional and cultural nuance. This adaptability is particularly evident in Australia, a country characterised by its vast geography, cultural diversity, and a multifaceted healthcare system involving multiple funding approaches and sources. These unique factors not only present distinct challenges but also create significant opportunities, setting Australia's approach to social prescribing apart from that of other countries. Australia's place-based social prescribing models align with the intent of contemporary policies such as the *Measuring What Matters* framework, introduced by the Australian Treasury (3). While there are shared foundational principles with countries like the UK, such as person-centred care, community engagement, and multisectoral collaboration, Australia's specific geographic, cultural, and systemic circumstances lead to a distinctively layered and locally adapted social prescribing model, enhancing holistic healthcare delivery across the nation.

Geographic and Demographic Considerations

Australia's approach to social prescribing is deeply influenced by its unique geographic and demographic landscape, characterised by vast rural and remote areas alongside more densely populated urban centres. This sprawling and diverse landscape necessitates highly localised social prescribing initiatives, tailored to meet the specific needs of individual communities spread across the country.

Unlike nations with high population densities and centralised health systems, Australia's challenges are compounded by significant distances and regional diversity, which demand innovative and adaptable solutions. For instance, the remote and rural areas not only require programs that address local health determinants but also need to ensure accessibility to such services, which can be hindered by the sparse distribution of population and resources.

To address these challenges, there are significant opportunities for innovative strategies like utilising technology to bridge the gaps created by geographical distances. Telehealth services, digital health apps, and online community engagement platforms are increasingly being utilised to deliver health services and facilitate social prescribing activities, ensuring that individuals in remote areas have access to necessary health and social resources without the need for extensive travel.

Community collaboration also plays a pivotal role in the successful implementation of social prescribing initiatives in these diverse settings. By engaging with local organisations and leveraging existing community networks, social prescribing can be effectively integrated into the regional fabric of our nation. This not only enhances the cultural appropriateness and acceptance of such programs but also ensures that they are sustainable and aligned with local needs and resources.

Cultural Richness

Australia's social prescribing model is distinctly enriched by the nation's cultural diversity, which includes a profound connection to the heritage and wisdom of its First Nations communities as well as a broad mosaic of migrant cultures. This diversity necessitates a social prescribing approach that is not only culturally sensitive but also deeply nuanced, ensuring that the health and wellbeing strategies are effectively tailored to meet the diverse needs of these communities.

The intricate tapestry of Indigenous and multicultural populations in Australia calls for the creation of customised frameworks that can address the specific health and wellbeing requirements of these varied groups. Initiatives such as the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework (4), which are informed by and tailored around the deep cultural knowledge and practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are exemplary in this regard. These frameworks help in crafting social prescribing pathways that are not only personalised but also culturally resonant, fostering a greater connection to community and culture.

Moreover, Australia's commitment to multiculturalism and its growing recognition of the importance of connection to country, championed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodians of culture, add significant depth to the social prescribing model. These elements ensure that the approach goes beyond basic medical care, incorporating spiritual, communal, and environmental dimensions that are crucial for holistic health.

This localised approach aligns well with the foundational principle of person-centred care, a concept that Australia shares with international models like the UK's but with a unique layering that adds complexity and distinctiveness. By integrating the cultural values and practices intrinsic to its diverse populations, Australia sets an international exemplar in multicultural healthcare, demonstrating how deeply integrated cultural sensitivity can enhance the effectiveness and acceptance of social prescribing.

These efforts not only respect and preserve the cultural heritage of the populations they serve but also actively engage these communities in the design and implementation of health interventions. This collaborative approach ensures that social prescribing in Australia is not confined to healthcare but acts as a cultural bridge, enhancing the nation's fabric of community health and wellbeing.

Health and Social System Landscape

Australia's health system is marked by a complex arrangement of multiple funding sources and service providers spread across various jurisdictions. This configuration results in a fragmented healthcare landscape that can complicate the navigation of social prescribing pathways. While this fragmentation presents challenges, it also creates unique opportunities across different regions and levels of government.

The distributed nature of healthcare responsibilities across local, state, and federal levels allows for a multifaceted approach to health and wellbeing. Each level of government can implement tailored social prescribing initiatives that address local community needs specifically. This decentralisation means that social prescribing programs can be more closely aligned with local cultures, unique socioeconomic conditions, and health priorities, potentially increasing their effectiveness and relevance.

This system creates conditions for multisectoral collaboration that is crucial in the Australian context. While coordination across government sectors, healthcare providers, and community organisations remains a persistent challenge, these connections (where they exist) can transform fragmentation into a strength through comprehensive community engagement.

In practice, this means that social prescribing in Australia can leverage a broad spectrum of resources and initiatives, from public health campaigns and community-based wellness programs to more specialised medical interventions. The involvement of multiple departments and agencies also disperses the funding and administrative responsibilities, enhancing the sustainability and reach of social prescribing services.

This structured yet flexible approach allows for dynamic and continually evolving social prescribing models that are responsive to the specific needs and insights of local communities. It embodies Australia's person-centred philosophy in healthcare, where investments in social prescribing are not only about treating diseases but enhancing overall wellbeing. The Australian healthcare system has an opportunity to demonstrate this commitment by integrating research directly into practice improving based on empirical evidence and community feedback, ensuring that social prescribing remains an effective and integral part of the national health strategy. A possible drawback to the distributed nature of our healthcare system is that there is a potential for inconsistencies in the delivery of social prescribing services. Therefore, having a clear set of competencies and skills required of a social prescribing Link Worker is vital to ensure high quality support.

Policy and Research Integration

Alongside the structural opportunities described above, there is growing momentum toward more systematic integration of research and data within social prescribing in Australia. There is a unique opportunity to approach social prescribing more systematically than other international jurisdictions. This systematic approach involves intentionally embedding data capture and research capabilities within social prescribing frameworks, allowing for comprehensive insights that can inform policy across all levels of government.

By harnessing localised data from community engagements and social prescribing activities, Australia can build a robust evidence base that addresses both immediate health needs and broader systemic factors affecting health and wellbeing. This proactive integration of data-driven strategies ensures that policy adjustments are not only informed by empirical evidence but are also timely and relevant to the specific challenges and opportunities within different regions of Australia.

The strategic focus on capturing meaningful data about unmet needs, barriers and enablers to access, and outcomes of social prescribing initiatives allows for a dynamic policymaking process. This process is continually informed by the latest research and community feedback, with the aim of making the social prescribing model in Australia both adaptable and forward-looking.

Moreover, this commitment to systematic data integration and research-led policymaking positions Australia as a leader in developing comprehensive, community-centric health interventions. It ensures that the social prescribing system not only responds effectively to current health challenges but also evolves to pre-emptively address emerging health trends and needs.

This approach exemplifies a sophisticated strategy where social prescribing in Australia does not merely adapt to, but actively shapes, health policy and practices. This sets a global standard for how social prescribing can be an important element of a national health strategy, driven by a commitment to enhancing wellbeing through informed, data-driven decision-making.

Opportunities Specific to the Australian Context

As noted in the **Introduction**, Australia's social prescribing model is influenced by several local factors that distinguish its approach. Together, these factors create a unique environment that not only influences the structure and implementation of social prescribing but also enhances its acceptance, adaptability, and effectiveness across different communities. The following list is not exhaustive and provides an overview of unique opportunities presented within Australia's specific context.

Diverse Funding Avenues

In Australia, the multiplicity of funding sources allows for greater flexibility in the creation and trial of social prescribing programs. Various financial routes are available for piloting initiatives that are tailored to meet specific community needs. This adaptability is especially crucial in addressing the geographic and cultural diversities within the country, enabling more customised and effective healthcare solutions.

Technological Innovation

Australia's robust technological sector provides a fertile ground for innovation that can bolster social prescribing efforts, particularly when addressing the nation's unique geographic challenges. Digital platforms can facilitate more efficient linkages between healthcare providers, community organisations, and individuals, making social prescribing more accessible and effective.

Culture of Resilience

The Australian ethos embodies a sense of adaptability and resilience, honed by its historical challenges and opportunities. This cultural backdrop is fertile ground for the introduction and acceptance of innovative healthcare models, including social prescribing. Communities are often predisposed to adapt and thrive using new approaches, making the healthcare landscape more agile and responsive.

Spirit of Mateship

The Australian ideal of 'mateship' emphasises community solidarity and mutual aid. This sense of community can significantly facilitate the adoption and effectiveness of social prescribing initiatives that rely on local resources and support networks. It forms a social fabric that is conducive to more inclusive and effective healthcare solutions.

First Nations Wisdom

Australia's social prescribing model gains a deeper layer of richness by integrating the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework and First Nations wisdom into its practices (4). Acknowledging the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, and spiritual realms, as well as the importance of community and connection to country, enhances not just the cultural sensitivity but also the effectiveness of social prescribing initiatives.

Environmental Enrichment

Australia's vast and varied natural landscapes offer unparalleled opportunities for nature-based intervention programs. From beachside communities to rugged inland forest terrains, the environment itself becomes a backdrop for health-promoting activities. These natural settings contribute additional dimensions to social prescribing, enabling a wide range of activities that encourage nature connection and environmental stewardship, benefiting the health of people and planet.

Responding to climate change

Australia is on the front line of climate change, with higher temperatures, prolonged drought, fire seasons, flooding and air pollution impacting communities disproportionately. Social prescribing supports the urgent need to decarbonise healthcare with its preventive approach that focuses on health promotion practice delivered locally in community settings. This reduces dependency on carbon-intensive treatment options and encourages health self-management, psychosocial support, and community solutions. Social prescribing can also facilitate practical actions to address the direct impacts of climate change, respond to people's experiences of extreme weather events, and build climate-resilient communities.

Core Principles of Social Prescribing in Australia

The foundation of Australia's unique approach to social prescribing is built upon four core principles, each tailored to align with the nation's distinct geographical, cultural, and systemic realities. These principles—Person-Centred Wellbeing, Holistic Wellbeing, Community Resources, and Measurable Outcomes—collectively capture the essence of what makes social prescribing in Australia both distinctive and effective. While the concept of social prescribing is global, Australia's model is uniquely adapted to its local conditions and values. These core principles serve as a guide, ensuring that social prescribing in Australia is not only a multidimensional tool for healthcare but also a reflective model of its rich cultural tapestry and complex healthcare system.

Person-Centred and Community-First Driven Wellbeing

Person-centred and community-first wellbeing form the bedrock of social prescribing in Australia, reflecting a deep-seated commitment to ensuring that both individual and communal needs guide healthcare strategies. This dual focus is essential, as it emphasises the importance of individuals taking active and accountable roles in managing their health and wellbeing, while also ensuring that the broader community's needs and opportunities are considered.

In this model, individuals are encouraged to make informed choices about their physical, social, emotional, and environmental wellbeing, tapping into both medical and non-medical opportunities to enhance their quality of life. This person-centred approach aligns seamlessly with Australia's unique, grassroots-oriented healthcare landscape, which is characterised by strong community engagement and multisectoral collaboration.

Simultaneously, the community-first perspective ensures that social prescribing is also driven by the needs and opportunities within broader communities. This approach supports a place-based and person-led framework,

where social prescribing initiatives are designed and implemented based on direct input from local communities and neighbourhoods. It shifts away from top-down, one-size-fits-all models, towards more localised, tailored interventions that resonate more deeply with the specific cultural, social, and environmental contexts of each community.

By embodying a more self-directed and community-engaged approach to healthcare, this principle ensures that social prescribing not only empowers individuals but also strengthens community ties, builds resilience, and fosters a collective sense of wellbeing. This comprehensive strategy ensures that health interventions are not only responsive but also proactive, addressing both immediate health needs and broader societal and ecological determinants of health through inclusive, community-driven actions.

Holistic Wellbeing: Cultural Safety, Inclusion, and Social Contribution

Social prescribing in Australia extends beyond traditional medical solutions to embrace social, emotional, vocational, ecological, and cultural dimensions, thus embodying a truly holistic approach to healthcare. This principle is closely aligned with the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework and incorporates First Nations wisdom, acknowledging the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, and spiritual realms.

In addition to these aspects, the Australian approach to social prescribing is intended to be deeply committed to cultural safety and inclusion. It ensures that services are delivered in a way that is safe for all individuals, respecting and acknowledging cultural differences and the historical context that influences health. This commitment to cultural safety is particularly significant in engagements with First Nations communities, where understanding and respecting cultural identity and connection to country are paramount.

Furthermore, the principles of kindness and generativity are central to the ethos of social prescribing in Australia. These values encourage individuals and communities to interact with respect for differences and to contribute meaningfully to the common good. By fostering an environment of inclusivity and support, social prescribing not only enhances individual health outcomes but also strengthens community bonds and encourages social responsibility.

This comprehensive model of holistic wellbeing in social prescribing supports individuals not just in achieving better health outcomes but also in making valuable social contributions. It promotes a sense of belonging and purpose, which are crucial for long-term wellbeing. By integrating cultural safety, inclusion, kindness, and generativity into its core principles, social prescribing in Australia moves beyond individual wellbeing to foster a healthier, more cohesive society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Leveraging Community Resources: Culture, Sustainability, and Equity

In Australia, social prescribing is deeply embedded in the culture of community, mateship, and volunteerism, which has historically played a significant role in health and community settings. While volunteering rates have declined in recent years, this culture of mutual aid remains a meaningful asset which plays a pivotal role in the sustainability and efficacy of health interventions. The spirit of volunteerism is exemplified by the fact that almost 1% of the population serves as a volunteer firefighter (which is 9th in the world) (5), demonstrating the strong community commitment to mutual aid and support. This culture is a significant asset in the social prescribing landscape, where local organisations and volunteer groups become essential partners in healthcare.

The utilisation of community resources in social prescribing not only allows for the creation of personalised care plans that are culturally sensitive and locally relevant but also helps in overcoming the geographic challenges unique to Australia. By leveraging these local assets, social prescribing provides effective care solutions that are accessible to both urban and remote populations, enhancing the overall sustainability of health services.

However, sustainability is not just about maintaining resources but also ensuring that they are appropriately allocated and accessible to those who need them most. This involves strategic planning to ensure that the right services are available in the right places and that access and equity are prioritised. Effective social prescribing systems are those that can identify gaps in service provision and respond with initiatives that increase availability and reduce disparities. Finally, sustainability captures social prescribing's lower carbon

delivery model and its contribution to environmentally sustainable healthcare, aligning with Australia's National Healthcare and Climate Strategy (2023) (6).

Social prescribing in Australia is committed to not just using community resources but also to strengthening and expanding them. This includes fostering a continuous cycle of community involvement where programs not only draw on local support but also contribute back to the community's capacity. This symbiotic relationship enhances the resilience of both individuals and the broader community, ensuring that the social fabric is strengthened through every intervention.

The emphasis on equity ensures that social prescribing efforts are aligned with the principles of fairness and inclusiveness, guaranteeing that vulnerable populations and marginalised groups receive the support they need. By focusing on equitable access to services, social prescribing in Australia not only addresses immediate health needs but also works towards reducing long-term systemic barriers that impact community wellbeing.

Measurable Outcomes: Meaningful Measurement to Ensure Impact and Community Efficacy

Australia places a high value on meaningful measurement within social prescribing to ensure that interventions not only achieve tangible impacts but also address systemic barriers and enhance community efficacy. This approach to evaluation goes beyond conventional metrics, employing a broad spectrum of indicators that reflect both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of health and wellbeing.

This sophisticated measurement strategy includes metrics such as reductions in hospital visits and improvements in physical health, alongside enhancements in life satisfaction, increased community involvement, and expanded employment opportunities. By adopting a comprehensive evaluation framework, we can capture a holistic view of individual and community health outcomes.

The focus on meaningful measurement ensures that social prescribing initiatives are rigorously assessed for their ability to address not just the symptoms but also the underlying social determinants of health. This includes evaluating how well these programs overcome barriers to access, such as geographical isolation, cultural misunderstandings, or socioeconomic disadvantages. It examines the efficacy of interventions in fostering community resilience, empowering local groups, and building social capital, which are crucial for sustained wellbeing.

By integrating both direct health outcomes and broader community impacts into its evaluation frameworks, Australian social prescribing not only adheres to a model of comprehensive health care but also contributes to the creation of empowered, resilient communities.

Part I: Foundations

Introduction

Welcome to the Link Worker Education Standards for Social Prescribing in Australia. This document is crafted to serve as an authoritative guide for educating and training Link Workers, the key to implementing effective social prescribing. Given Australia's unique healthcare landscape, geographical diversity, and cultural richness, these standards aim to outline the skills and knowledge Link Workers require to navigate these complexities effectively.

Purpose

The primary purpose of these education standards is to equip Link Workers with the competencies required to successfully facilitate social prescribing within Australia's unique context. These standards lay down the educational criteria that encompass understanding regional differences, acknowledging First Nations wisdom, utilising technological platforms, and promoting a culture of resilience and mateship, all while ensuring person-centred care and multisectoral collaboration.

Rationale

As social prescribing becomes an integral part of Australia's healthcare model, the role of Link Workers grows increasingly important. To ensure the effective implementation and sustainability of social prescribing initiatives, it's vital that Link Workers are trained according to a standardised set of educational criteria. This is particularly crucial in Australia, where healthcare delivery faces unique challenges and opportunities due to geographic expanses, a complex multi-funder system, and a diverse population.

Who Is This Document For?

This set of standards is designed for:

- **Link Worker Training Organisations:** Entities responsible for the education and ongoing professional development of Link Workers.
- **Healthcare Providers:** Medical professionals who collaborate with Link Workers in delivering person-centred, holistic healthcare solutions.
- **Community Organisations:** Local groups that are part of the social prescribing network and interact regularly with Link Workers.
- **Policymakers:** Government bodies and officials who are looking to standardise and possibly regulate the educational aspects of the Link Worker role.
- **Researchers:** Academics studying the impact and effectiveness of Link Workers within the Australian social prescribing landscape, including those affiliated with the Australian Social Prescribing Institute of Research and Education.
- **Funding Organisations:** Parties interested in financially supporting Link Worker education and training programs.

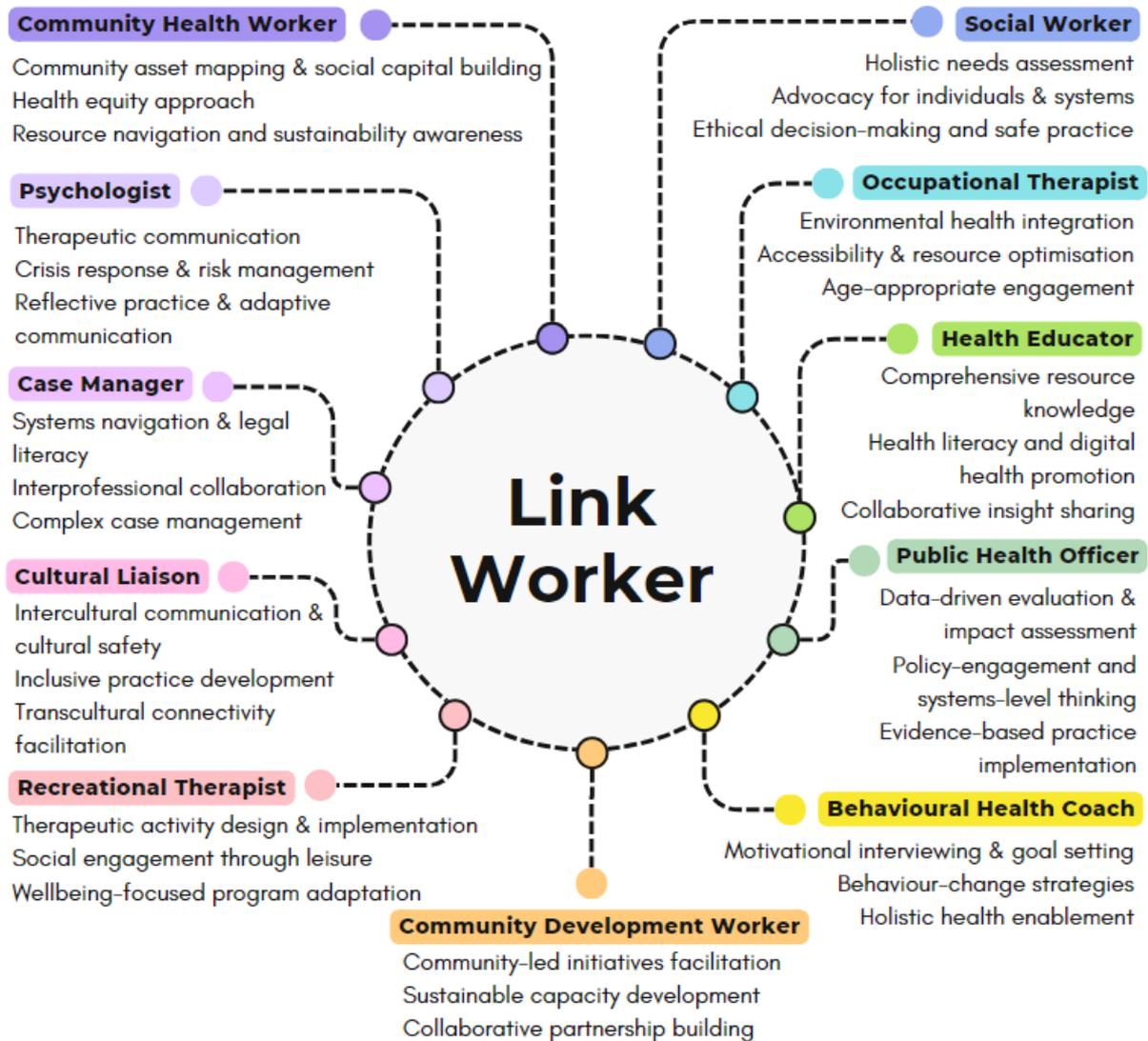
The goal of these standards is to foster effective collaboration among all partners while enhancing the professional calibre and efficacy of Link Workers in Australia.

Context and Principles

Australian Social Prescribing Landscape

Social prescribing seeks to nurture and build individual and community resources focusing on health and wellbeing rather than factors that cause disease. This preventative health approach values and harnesses people's inherent capabilities, knowledge, networks, and contributions, fostering an environment where individuals can reach their full potential, and communities can prosper together (7). Australia's social prescribing landscape is characterised by its unique geography, cultural diversity, and complex healthcare ecosystem, each shaping the role and educational requisites for Link Workers in distinct ways. Unlike centralised healthcare models like the UK's National Health Service (NHS), Australia's healthcare system is a blend of federal and state governance, further complicated by a myriad of private and community service providers. This fragmented, multi-funder system necessitates a robust role for educated and qualified Link

Workers, who must navigate this complex environment to connect individuals with the most appropriate resources. The Link Workers are drawing on skillsets from various allied health professions, as demonstrated in the figure below. The figure depicts the Link Worker role at the intersection of multiple health, social care, and community development professions, illustrating how link worker practice draws on skills traditionally associated with roles including social work, community health, psychology, and occupational therapy, among others. As their skillset is so diverse, it is vital to have clear competencies and graduate attributes established to ensure quality delivery of care at a national level.



One of the most prominent factors affecting social prescribing in Australia is its geographical vastness, consisting of both densely populated urban centres and isolated rural communities. The heterogeneity in these regions not only influences healthcare accessibility but also the types of social and community resources available. Therefore, Link Workers in Australia must be educated to adapt their approach to fit these diverse geographical settings. This includes leveraging local resources for wellbeing activities, which can range from beachside mindfulness sessions in coastal cities to Indigenous storytelling and nature walks in rural communities.

Cultural diversity further nuances the Australian social prescribing landscape. Home to a rich tapestry of communities, including First Nations peoples and migrants from various ethnic backgrounds, the 'one-size-fits-all' models of healthcare delivery are impractical. Link Workers must, therefore, be trained to understand and respect the cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity that individuals bring to the healthcare experience. This

includes a nuanced understanding of frameworks such as the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework (4), which is particularly important in working with First Nations communities.

Given the multifaceted funding nature of Australia's healthcare systems, Link Workers also need a working knowledge of various funding avenues. The presence of multiple funders provides diverse financial routes for social prescribing programs but also adds another layer of complexity. Understanding how to tap into these different streams of funding can be crucial for the sustainability and scalability of social prescribing initiatives.

Lastly, Australia's cultural traits, such as the culture of resilience and the spirit of mateship, subtly yet significantly influence the social prescribing dynamics. Link Workers often find themselves not just as connectors of medical and social resources but also as key players in fostering community engagement and resilience. Their role extends beyond mere facilitators to become enablers of a more empowered, resilient, and connected community.

Australia's social prescribing landscape presents a complex interplay of geographical, cultural, and systemic factors. Understanding these unique elements is not just beneficial but essential for Link Workers. Their education and training need to be tailored to equip them with the competencies required to navigate and leverage these complexities effectively, thereby optimising the potential of social prescribing in improving Australia's healthcare outcomes.

Relevance to Indigenous Communities

Many of the core principles underpinning social prescribing are already deeply embedded within a Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) approach. In many First Nations communities, the strong and enduring connections to culture, Country, kin, and community naturally provide what social prescribing seeks to achieve. Because of this, the concept of "social prescribing" as described in mainstream health systems can be less relevant to First Nations communities.

Understanding and applying social prescribing in Australia therefore requires a genuine appreciation of its relationship to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing. The complexities of this work become more pronounced when engaging with First Nations communities, where social, cultural, and historical factors demand a more holistic, culturally grounded, and nuanced approach.

One of the foundational aspects to consider is the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework (4), which is integral to understanding health and wellbeing in Indigenous contexts. Unlike mainstream models that often focus primarily on individual health indicators, this framework encompasses a more holistic view. It recognises the interconnectedness of physical, social, emotional, cultural, and spiritual factors, as well as the collective wellbeing of the community. For Link Workers working within Indigenous communities, a thorough understanding and application of this framework are crucial. This goes beyond a checklist approach to include a deep understanding of the cultural determinants of health, such as connection to country, cultural identity, and the impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma.

A competent Link Worker in an Indigenous context must also be educated in culturally sensitive and respectful engagement. Given the historical and ongoing experiences of marginalisation, understanding how to establish trust and how to consult community elders and leaders is crucial. The aim is to forge partnerships that honour Indigenous wisdom and traditions rather than impose external solutions. Link Workers serve not just as connectors but also as listeners and learners, recognising and respecting the community's inherent strengths and resilience.

Furthermore, the social prescribing model in Indigenous settings may incorporate traditional practices and indigenous knowledge as valid pathways for health and wellbeing. This could involve connecting individuals to traditional healers, organising community events around storytelling, art, and dance, or facilitating outdoor activities that connect individuals to their ancestral lands.

The unique geographic factors associated with many Indigenous communities, particularly those in remote or rural settings, add another layer of complexity. Social prescribing solutions in these contexts may require innovative and adapted approaches to overcome challenges related to accessibility and availability of services.

A tailored set of competencies is therefore required for Link Workers to adapt their methods to these specific settings effectively.

Social prescribing in Indigenous communities is not merely a translation of mainstream models but necessitates a genuinely tailored approach that is culturally competent, geographically sensitive, and aligned with the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework (4). Link Workers engaging with Indigenous communities must be adequately trained in these specialised competencies to enact social prescribing in a manner that is both effective and respectful. This not only enriches the scope of social prescribing but is a requisite for ensuring that it addresses the unique needs and strengths of Australia's First Nations peoples.

The Impact of Geography

Australia's vast and varied geographic landscape presents unique challenges and opportunities for social prescribing that are integral to understanding the competencies required for Link Workers. The sheer expanse of the country, combined with its varied geographic landscapes ranging from densely populated urban centres to sparsely populated rural and remote areas, makes a one-size-fits-all approach unfeasible.

In urban settings, Link Workers often find a plethora of community resources and services at their disposal but also face challenges of service fragmentation, access inequality, and the fast pace of life that may impede wellbeing. The skillset required in these situations leans heavily towards effective navigation of complex, multi-tiered systems, and an ability to connect individuals with specialised services that are most aligned with their needs.

In contrast, remote and rural communities pose a different set of challenges. Services are often less abundant, requiring innovative solutions to provide care and support. In these contexts, the role of a Link Worker extends beyond merely connecting individuals to existing services; they may need to facilitate the creation of new, localised solutions. Here, the competencies shift towards community engagement, resourcefulness, and a deep understanding of local culture and geography. For instance, leveraging local natural landscapes for outdoor activities can become an integral part of a social prescription.

Geography also intersects significantly with the issues faced by Indigenous communities. Many First Nations peoples live in remote areas where conventional healthcare services are limited or entirely absent. A skilled Link Worker, in this context, must understand how to adapt social prescribing models that are culturally sensitive and geographically feasible. Whether it involves facilitating virtual consultations with medical specialists or organising community-led traditional healing sessions, the competencies required are markedly different.

Additionally, Australia's unique flora and fauna offer opportunities for nature-based intervention programs that are distinctive to the country. Programs may include bushwalking, beach activities, or even kangaroo spotting, each contributing to emotional and physical wellbeing in a manner that is distinctively Australian.

Another key aspect is disaster preparedness. Given Australia's susceptibility to increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters like bushfires, floods, and cyclones, part of a Link Worker's competency might include knowledge of local emergency services and disaster recovery resources. Link Workers may also support communities with climate change adaptation and resilience. Being able to incorporate these aspects into social prescribing models and collaborative working practices can be invaluable, especially as more areas become prone to such occurrences.

Australia's geographic diversity necessitates a multifaceted, localised approach to social prescribing. Link Workers must be trained to adapt their methods to suit the specific geographic conditions they encounter, whether they are working in bustling cities, quiet rural areas, or remote Indigenous communities. This adaptability not only maximises the efficacy of social prescribing interventions but also ensures that they are relevant and culturally appropriate, meeting the unique needs that are a part of Australia's diverse landscapes.

Fragmented Funding Environment

Australia's social prescribing initiatives exist within a complex, multi-funder healthcare system that substantially impacts how Link Workers operate. Unlike centralised systems such as the UK's NHS, Australia's

healthcare funding comes from various sources—federal and state governments, private insurance companies, philanthropic contributions, and community grants. This fragmentation complicates the coordination and integration of services but also provides unique avenues for innovation and customisation.

The diversity of funding streams can lead to a patchwork of available services and community activities, differing not only from state to state but even within regions. Link Workers must, therefore, be competent in understanding and navigating this fractured landscape. This requires a broad knowledge base covering the eligibility criteria for various community programs, application processes, and the efficient utilisation of limited resources to maximise health and wellbeing outcomes.

The fragmented funding environment also necessitates strong skills in multi-sectoral collaboration. Link Workers need to understand how to leverage partnerships between healthcare providers, community organisations, and various funding bodies. This collaboration is essential for drawing together disparate services and community resources into a coherent and effective social prescription, thereby overcoming the inherent challenges of a fragmented system.

In addition to this, the volatility of funding streams, subject to political and economic fluctuations, adds an extra layer of complexity. Programs may be short-lived or have their funding reduced or discontinued. Link Workers must be agile and adaptive, with a focus on sustainability and the capacity to rapidly modify social prescriptions as funding landscapes change.

Given that funding can also be project or target-specific, there are often opportunities for piloting innovative approaches. For instance, if a grant is available for mental health initiatives, Link Workers could design or adapt social prescriptions that focus on mental wellbeing, thereby aligning with funding priorities.

It's also crucial for Link Workers to be competent at reporting and outcome measurement. Given the diversity of funding sources, each may have its own set of requirements for accountability and effectiveness metrics. Understanding how to interpret and present data in a way that satisfies these varied expectations is an essential element of the Link Worker role. Moreover, demonstrating the health impact of social prescribing programs effectively strengthens the case for longer term funding commitments, creating a more sustainable funding landscape and building community capacity.

In a fragmented funding environment, creative problem-solving becomes more than a skill; it is a necessity. Link Workers may find themselves stitching together resources from various sectors—health, social care, education, and even the environment—to create a comprehensive and effective social prescription.

Australia's fragmented funding landscape mean that Link Workers need a comprehensive and complex skill set, including a thorough knowledge of funding structures, skills in partnership-building, adaptability, and an aptitude for reporting and evaluation. This is crucial for not only navigating but thriving within Australia's unique social prescribing framework.

Glossary of Terms

Active Listening	A communication skill that enables the practitioner to fully concentrate on what is being said, and seeking to understand its meaning and intent, rather than passively hearing the speaker's message.
Active Signposting	A 'light touch' approach where health or social care workers direct people to relevant community-based services, groups and activities available locally.
Allied Health (professionals)	University-qualified health and social care professionals who use evidence-based practices to prevent, diagnose, and treat various conditions and illnesses. They often work in multidisciplinary teams and represent the second-largest clinical workforce in Australia after nursing and midwifery (8).
Appropriate Care	People are receiving the right care, and the right amount of care according to their needs and preferences, at the right time. The care offered should also be based on the best available evidence (9).
Arts in Health	The practice where engagement with arts and culture leads to therapeutic health and wellbeing outcomes.
ASPIRE	The Australian Social Prescribing Institute of Research and Education. ASPIRE promotes a national approach to research, data collection, education, policy, and practice for social prescribing in Australia.
Asset Based Approach	A shift away from deficit models of health that focus on needs and problems towards an approach that builds on individual, community and environmental resources to co-create solutions that further strengthen communities and reflect their priorities.
Asset Based Community Development	A community-driven development approach that recognises and mobilises existing individual and community assets (e.g., skills, social relationships, heritage, local associations) and emphasises collaboration and capacity building.
Audit	A systematic review against a predetermined set of criteria.
Buddy System	A support structure that pairs individuals for mutual assistance or guidance.
Care Navigation	An approach that supports person-centred care. Care navigation enables people to access the right type of support for their health and care requirements at the right time. This may involve planning appointments or connecting with relevant community and government programs.
Care Navigator	A health or social care professional that helps people navigate through health and social care systems; ensuring they receive comprehensive support.
Co-Production	A collaborative approach to service design and delivery, incorporating input from various involved parties, including service users.
Community Assets	Local resources available to the community. This includes infrastructure such as community centres, meeting venues and libraries, plus cultural assets, arts and music, and the natural environment.
Community Referral	Also known as a Social Prescription, it provides the infrastructure to connect people to alternative clinical and non-clinical services, activities and groups that support health and wellbeing.
Community Resources	Community-based services, groups, activities, peer support, social networks, learning, and volunteering.
Community Support Hubs	Central points in communities where individuals can access various forms of support, including social prescribing.

Creative Referral	An umbrella term that describes referrals to creative or artistic activities such as singing, writing, painting, dance, and film, that have therapeutic benefits.
Digital Social Prescribing	The use of digital platforms and services to facilitate social prescribing.
Environmentally Sustainable Healthcare	Addressing the Australian healthcare sector's carbon footprint and environmental impact, while promoting the health and wellbeing of people and planet.
Evidence Based Medicine	The practice of using scientific research to inform healthcare decisions and patient care pathways.
Exercise Referral	Referrals to exercise programs or physical activities designed to improve people's overall health and wellbeing.
Health Coaching	The practice where health or social care professionals enable people to build relevant health knowledge, skills, and confidence to become active participants in their own care.
Health Equity	The principle and goal of achieving fair and just opportunities for people and communities to attain their full health and wellbeing potential - regardless of social, economic, demographic, or geographic differences.
Health and Wellbeing Alliance	A collaborative framework that involves various healthcare entities working together to promote overall wellbeing.
Holistic	Considering the health and wellbeing of the whole person, rather than focusing solely on symptoms or conditions.
Integrated Care Teams	Partnerships between professionals and organisations that meet health and care needs across an area, aiming to coordinate services and improve population health.
Link Worker	Also known as a Social Prescriber or Navigator, this individual provides emotional and practical support, ensuring people are connected to appropriate services and resources that promote health and wellbeing.
Motivational Interviewing	Motivational Interviewing is a collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication with particular attention to the language of change. It is designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion (10).
Nature-Based Interventions	Activities or therapies that aim to engage people in nature-based experiences in green (e.g. parks, bush) and blue (e.g. lakes, ocean) spaces that promote health and wellbeing. Examples include forest walks, nature journalling and beach yoga.
Neighbourhood House	Neighbourhood Houses (also known as Neighbourhood Centres and Community Houses in some states and territories) are local organisations that provide social, educational, and recreational activities for their communities in a welcoming and supportive environment underpinned by a community development framework. Neighbourhood houses are usually managed by volunteer committees and paid staff.
Nature Prescription	A practice where health or social care professionals connect people to natural environments or structured nature-based intervention for improved physical, mental and social health benefits.
Needs and Goals Assessment	A discussion between the Link Worker and the individual that focuses on understanding the person's unique needs, interests, and aspirations. It involves active listening and empathy and may include the gathering of information from various facets of the individual's life like physical health, emotional wellbeing, social connections, and personal goals. It does not purely focus on 'fixing' an issue but rather on co-creating a supportive pathway that respects the individual's priorities and choices.

Person-Centred Approach	An approach to healthcare where people are treated as individuals with unique needs, preferences and goals. This requires a tailored approach that is guided by a person's values, strengths and capabilities.
Person-Led	An approach to healthcare where the individual drives the decision-making about their own health and wellbeing.
Personalised Care	A change in healthcare delivery that takes a whole-system approach whereby services and community support are integrated around the person. It gives people more choice and control over their own healthcare journey; emphasises 'what matters' to them; and facilitates community connection.
Referral	The act of linking someone to a relevant service, activity or group that could benefit their health or wellbeing.
Self-Care	The ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, and maintain health with or without the support of their healthcare team (adapted from WHO 2013) (11).
Social, Structural and Environmental Determinants of Health	Interconnected conditions and systems in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age and which influence health outcomes and equity. Examples include housing, income, and social inclusion; socioeconomic policies; and the built and natural environment.
Social Prescribing	Primarily carried out by a Link Worker, this approach enables health and social care professionals to connect people to non-clinical services, activities, and groups in community settings to meet the practical, social, and emotional needs that affect their health and wellbeing.
Wellbeing	A mental and physical state of feeling comfortable, healthy, and happy. It is a resource for living that is impacted by socio-economic, and environmental conditions. It embodies quality of life and ways to contribute to society that have meaning and purpose (12).
Workforce	The collective term for individuals involved in health, social care, and community service delivery, including GPs, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, Link Workers, navigators, and community organisation staff.
World Health Organisation (WHO)	A United Nations body dealing with major global health issues, setting international standards for disease control and healthcare.

Part II: Curriculum Framework

Graduate Attributes

Graduate attributes are the broad professional characteristics and values that Link Workers should embody upon completing their training. They describe the kind of practitioner a Link Worker will be, rather than specific technical skills.



1. Ethical

Social prescribing Link Workers demonstrate a strong ethical foundation, supporting autonomy, beneficence, and displaying principled decision-making in complex scenarios while considering professional responsibilities and applying holistic and respectful ways of thinking.

Attribute Indicators:

- Professional Integrity:** Uphold and promote ethical standards in all aspects of practice, including confidentiality, informed consent, and respect for autonomy.
- Ethical Awareness and Reasoning:** Demonstrate advanced capabilities in recognising and analysing ethical dimensions of social prescribing scenarios.
- Ethical Decision-Making:** Apply ethical frameworks to resolve complex dilemmas, considering multiple partner perspectives.
- Legal and Ethical Compliance:** Understand and adhere to legal and professional ethical guidelines relevant to social prescribing.
- Holistic Awareness:** Demonstrate an understanding of the interconnectedness between individuals, communities, and the natural world. Make ethically sound decisions in social prescribing that respect and promote environmental balance, recognising the equal importance of all beings in maintaining ecosystem health and respecting that contribution.

2. Inclusive and Respectful

Social prescribing Link Workers embody a deep appreciation for cultural diversity, demonstrating attitudes and awareness that foster inclusive environments and culturally sensitive approaches.

Attribute Indicators:

1. **Cultural Respect:** Demonstrate commitment to respecting people's traditional knowledge, customs, heritage, wisdom, and cultural beliefs and practices, with particular regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
2. **Cultural Awareness:** Demonstrate an understanding of diverse cultural perspectives and their impact on health and wellbeing.
3. **Cultural Humility:** Engage in ongoing self-reflection about personal cultural biases and their potential impact on practice.
4. **Inclusive Mindset:** Embrace and value diversity in all its forms, respecting and valuing diverse beliefs, histories, traits, and experiences, including but not limited to culture, ethnicity, race, disability, age, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and religion, fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for all.
5. **Commitment to Equity:** Demonstrate a dedication to promoting equitable access to health and social care services, community supports, and resources, with the goal of achieving improved health and wellbeing outcomes for all individuals and communities.

3. Effective Communicator

Social prescribing Link Workers display excellence in adaptive, person-centred communication, utilising a range of techniques to engage effectively with diverse individuals and groups in various contexts.

Attribute Indicators:

1. **Adaptive Communication:** Demonstrate proficiency in adapting communication style and methods to suit individual needs that are respectful and culturally appropriate, including employing a range of questioning techniques to gather accurate information and using various communication tools and technologies, including digital platforms and telehealth services, to ensure inclusive engagement.
2. **Active Listening and Deep Engagement:** Exhibit excellence in creating a supportive environment where individuals feel valued and understood through demonstrating attentive listening, using appropriate body language and non-verbal cues, and applying reflective communication techniques to ensure comprehensive understanding of perspectives and desires.
3. **Empathetic and Person-Centred Communication:** Show ability to recognise and validate individuals' feelings, thoughts, and behaviours as normal responses to their circumstances. Use reflective techniques to help individuals explore their unique narratives, reframe challenges, and identify sources of resilience and positive emotion.
4. **Management of Sensitive Conversations:** Display confidence and sensitivity in navigating difficult topics while maintaining respect and support and discussing complex health and social issues, including referrals to appropriate services and community activities.
5. **Using techniques to support action:** Employ evidence-based communication strategies that support individuals to make and maintain sustainable changes that matter to them and empower them to take control of their wellbeing (e.g., motivational interviewing, coaching skills).

4. Critical Thinker and Problem Solver

Social prescribing Link Workers apply analytical and creative thinking to address complex health and social issues, developing innovative, evidence-based solutions that consider long-term impacts and sustainability.

Attribute Indicators:

1. **Analytical and Innovative Thinking:** Demonstrate ability to analyse complex social and health issues, identifying root causes and potential solutions. Apply creative thinking to help individuals and communities reframe challenges, discover new meanings, and envision positive future narratives.
2. **Evidence-Informed Practice:** Use established evidence-informed approaches in their practice and contribute to evaluation activities through accurate data collection and documentation.
3. **Adaptive Problem Solving:** Show flexibility in adapting to new evidence, community needs, and technological advancements and demonstrate skill in navigating and harmonising diverse community interests and priorities, facilitating inclusive discussions to reach collaborative solutions.
4. **Supporting Community-Focused Initiatives:** Collaborate with team members and community stakeholders to contribute insights from day-to-day practice that inform organisational or regional strategies for health improvements. Focus on identifying immediate opportunities and barriers to enhance community health within the context of current resources and priorities.
5. **Resource Gap Analysis and Development:** Identify gaps in available resources and services and employ creative problem-solving to address immediate needs and advocate for the development of new resources to meet identified community requirements.
6. **Inclusive Thinking and Creativity:** Consider the ethical, cultural, and practical implications of new approaches and innovations in social prescribing and maximise inclusion and minimise inadvertently disadvantaging any group.

5. Systemic Change Catalyst

Social prescribing Link Workers demonstrate an understanding of the broader health and social care systems and recognise the need for systemic transformation to address health inequities and social determinants of wellbeing. They identify opportunities for improvement within their scope of practice and contribute to positive change through collaborative efforts and evidence-based advocacy.

Attribute Indicators:

1. **Systems Understanding:** Demonstrate a basic understanding of the broader health and social care systems, including their strengths and limitations in addressing community needs.
2. **Improvement Mindset:** Approach individual cases and community issues with an awareness of how they might inform potential improvements in service delivery or community support.
3. **Collective Action Contribution:** Participate in team or organisational efforts aimed at enhancing service quality and addressing systemic challenges within the scope of social prescribing.
4. **Intentional and Strategic:** Recognise ethical considerations in advocating for change, balancing immediate needs with long-term goals while maintaining professional integrity.
5. **Resilience and Adaptability:** Maintain a positive and solution-focused approach when navigating challenges within service delivery, demonstrating persistence in addressing individual and community needs. Support clients and colleagues by fostering motivation and adaptability, even in the face of organisational or systemic barriers.

6. Community Empowerment and Collaboration

Social prescribing Link Workers champion community empowerment, facilitate collaborative initiatives that enhance collective wellbeing, foster partnerships, and advocate for systemic changes to improve health equity. They demonstrate leadership in guiding community initiatives and facilitating collaborative decision-making processes that respect diverse perspectives and promote shared goals in health and wellbeing.

Attribute Indicators:

1. **Health Equity Approach:** Demonstrate understanding of social and structural determinants of health and their impact on individuals, marginalised groups, and communities and apply knowledge of factors such as housing, income, education, culture, social support, and environmental conditions to work towards equitable health opportunities for all.
2. **Community Empowerment and Capacity Building:** Embrace principles of community-led development and capacity building. Facilitate and support community members and partners in identifying and achieving shared health and wellbeing goals, enhancing their skills, knowledge, and confidence through collaborative learning processes.
3. **Collaborative Partnership Development:** Foster and maintain robust partnerships among diverse community members, including local organisations, health services, businesses, and community groups and negotiate, coordinate, and manage relationships to achieve shared community health and wellbeing objectives.
4. **Interprofessional Collaboration:** Demonstrate proficiency in working across various health, social care, and community sectors. Actively engage in interprofessional teams, recognising and respecting the roles and expertise of different professionals. Facilitate effective communication and collaboration between diverse professional groups to enhance the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of social prescribing practices.
5. **Facilitation of Collaborative Decision-Making:** Facilitate inclusive discussions and guide communities towards collaborative solutions. Balance diverse community interests and priorities, ensuring all voices are heard and respected.
6. **Supporting Positive Change:** Demonstrate a commitment to supporting individuals and communities, using data and insights, to address systemic barriers to health and wellbeing.

7. Reflective and Lifelong Learner

Social prescribing Link Workers engage in continuous self-improvement and professional development, regularly reflecting on their practice and staying abreast of current research and best practices in social care and community health.

Attribute Indicators:

1. **Evidence-Based Practice:** Commit to basing work on the latest research and best practices in social care and community health and continuously evaluate and adapt approaches based on feedback, outcomes, and professional insights.
2. **Reflective Practice:** Engage in ongoing self-assessment and learning from experiences, consider the impact of actions and decisions on personal competencies and people's outcomes, and apply reflective thinking to understand and navigate complex ethical dilemmas.
3. **Continuous Professional Development:** Demonstrate commitment to ongoing learning and skill enhancement in practical, legal, and ethical dimensions of social prescribing and actively pursue opportunities to master current research and understand comprehensive legal responsibilities.
4. **Professional Supervision, Peer Learning, and Mentorship:** Participate actively in regular, structured supervision sessions with qualified supervisors. Engage in peer-to-peer learning opportunities and contribute to the professional community through sharing insights and best practices. Seek mentorship to support personal growth and, as experience develops, engage in mentoring roles to support the development of other professionals in the field.
5. **Self-care and Collective Resilience:** Develop and maintain personal and organisational strategies for managing stress and preventing burnout, while fostering a supportive work culture that prioritises employee wellbeing in a challenging work environment.

Core Competencies

Core competencies are the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities required for effective Link Worker practice in the Australian context. Where graduate attributes describe professional character, core competencies describe what a Link Worker can do.



1. Working Across Australian Health and Social Systems

Social prescribing Link Workers demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of Australia's complex health and social systems, effectively navigating its multi-tiered structure to integrate social prescribing within existing health and social care frameworks.

Associated Skills:

- Multi-level System Understanding:** Demonstrate thorough knowledge of Australia's federal, state/territory, and local health and social systems and structures, including Medicare, My Aged Care, the NDIS, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and state-based health services.
- Understand and Respond to Local and Regional Needs:** Effectively use documents produced by Primary Health Networks, local governments and other needs assessments and plans to ensure social prescribing initiatives align with regional health priorities and contribute to population health planning.
- Cross-sectoral Integration:** Navigate and foster partnerships across public, private, and community health sectors, integrating social prescribing within Australia's unique healthcare landscape.
- Rural and Remote Adaptability:** Develop and implement social prescribing strategies tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities of rural and remote Australian communities including strategies for engaging hard-to-reach or underserved communities.

5. **Funding and Resource Navigation:** Maintain comprehensive knowledge of community assets, government funding schemes, and local service landscapes. This includes understanding opportunities available from local government, as well as an appreciation of state and Commonwealth funded services and supports. Support clients to access and navigate available resources while systematically documenting gaps and barriers encountered. Understand how different funding schemes operate and help connect clients with appropriate support options, maintaining current knowledge of eligibility criteria and access pathways.
6. **Integration with Existing Programs and Schemes:** Skilfully integrate social prescribing within funding schemes such as Australia's mental health initiatives, My Aged Care, the NDIS, skills building programs, and other specialised programs. Demonstrate proficiency in understanding and utilising schemes such as Medicare Better Access, state-based mental health programs, and other relevant specialised health and social care initiatives.
7. **Digital Health Integration:** Demonstrate proficiency in navigating and utilising digital health platforms and technologies relevant to social prescribing in Australia. This includes telehealth services, My Health Record, health apps, and online health information resources. Understand the benefits and limitations of digital health tools in the context of social prescribing and assist clients in accessing and using these technologies effectively.

2. Working with People on What Matters

Social prescribing Link Workers demonstrate expertise in engaging individuals in a holistic, strengths-based manner, collaboratively assessing needs and co-creating tailored social prescriptions that align with personal goals and values.

Associated Skills:

1. **Empathetic and Adaptive Communication:** Create a supportive and empowering environment where individuals feel genuinely heard and valued. Apply active listening, empathy, and adaptive questioning techniques to gather accurate information and facilitate open sharing of personal stories, challenges, and aspirations. Demonstrate confidence in managing sensitive conversations, ensuring respectful and supportive engagement.
2. **Inclusive and Context-Sensitive Collaboration:** Design and implement social prescribing programs in partnership with diverse community members. Ensure accessibility and relevance for all, considering factors such as age, disability, cultural background, and life experiences. Adjust approaches to provide inclusive, appropriate support, with particular consideration for marginalised groups.
3. **Comprehensive Strengths and Needs Assessment:** Undertake a holistic stocktake of individuals' strengths, needs, and circumstances across physical, emotional, social, and cultural dimensions. Explore personal narratives to uncover sources of meaning, positive experiences, and opportunities for growth and accomplishment.
4. **Collaborative Goal Setting and Social Prescription Co-Design:** Facilitate collaborative goal setting based on the person's values, needs, and deeper aspirations. Co-create tailored social prescriptions and personalised action plans that are realistic, inspiring, and aligned with individual capabilities and preferences, fostering engagement and a sense of purpose. Ensure active participation of and leadership by individuals in the decision-making process.
5. **Holistic Health Enablement:** Support individuals in navigating the social and structural determinants of health that influence their available resources and behaviours. Guide them in understanding and addressing both personal and systemic factors affecting their health and wellbeing. Assist in developing strategies to overcome individual barriers while recognising larger systemic issues that may need to be addressed at a population level.

6. **Adaptable Planning:** Link people with options and opportunities that are flexible and adaptable over time and regularly review and refine action plans to ensure ongoing alignment with evolving goals and circumstances
7. **Interprofessional Collaboration:** Actively engage in interprofessional teams, recognising and respecting the roles and expertise of different health and social care professionals. Facilitate effective communication and collaboration between diverse professional groups to enhance the comprehensiveness and effectiveness of social prescribing practices. Navigate potential challenges in interprofessional settings and advocate for the value of social prescribing within multidisciplinary care approaches.
8. **Trust and Relationship Building:** Develop and maintain trusting professional relationships with clients, communities, and service partners. Demonstrate trauma-informed practice, create safe spaces for engagement, work at the client's pace, and foster connections while maintaining appropriate boundaries. Build sustainable relationships that support ongoing engagement and facilitate connections between community members and services.

3. Resource Navigation and Management

Social prescribing Link Workers expertly identify, map, and utilise community resources. They guide individuals through health and social care systems, match resources to needs, and address access barriers, whilst emphasising sustainable and equitable resource use.

Associated Skills:

1. **Community Resource Mapping and Knowledge Management:** Conduct and maintain comprehensive mapping of local and national resources across various sectors at local, state, and national levels. Continuously update understanding of available services, programs, and opportunities, including those in the natural environment.
2. **Sustainable Resource Utilisation and Matching:** Develop strategies for efficient, equitable, and environmentally friendly use of community resources. Align available resources with individual client needs, preferences, and circumstances to create comprehensive support networks.
3. **Resource Optimisation and Development:** Work alongside individuals and communities to maximise utilisation of available resources, including identifying and leveraging unconventional or underutilised assets. Conduct gap analyses to identify resource shortfalls, creatively problem-solve to meet immediate needs, and advocate for the development of new resources. Co-design and implement community health initiatives that effectively align available and potential resources with individual and community needs.
4. **Systems Navigation:** Guide individuals through complex health and social care systems, understanding referral pathways and eligibility criteria. Assist in accessing and navigating various services and support mechanisms.
5. **Barrier Identification and Mitigation:** Identify and address barriers to resource access, including informational, physical, transport, financial, and language obstacles.
6. **Addressing the Digital Divide:** Enhance individuals' ability to access and navigate online government services, digital health resources, and telehealth platforms. Support people in developing digital skills to effectively utilise technological solutions for health, wellbeing, and community connection. Address barriers to digital access and use, acknowledging the increasing digitalisation of essential services and potential for digital exclusion.
7. **Collaborative Problem-Solving:** Work with service providers to find creative solutions for individual cases and advocate for exceptions or priority access when necessary and appropriate.
8. **Critical Analysis and Innovation:** Analyse complex social and health issues, identifying root causes and potential solutions. Apply creative thinking to help individuals and communities reframe challenges and develop innovative approaches to resource utilisation.

9. **Enterprising and Adaptive Practice:** Creatively utilise available resources and adapt approaches to local contexts and constraints. Demonstrate resilience and innovation in resource-limited settings, identify opportunities for service enhancement, and develop sustainable solutions using existing community assets. Maintain effectiveness while working within varying resource environments and organisational contexts.

4. Community Development and Social Capital Building

Social prescribing Link Workers champion community-led initiatives, applying specific skills to catalyse community engagement, build robust social connections, and facilitate initiatives that significantly enhance collective wellbeing and resilience.

Associated Skills:

1. **Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Actively foster community participation and decisively empower local residents to take leadership roles in community initiatives. Identify and co-create opportunities that deeply resonate with individuals' interests and aspirations, significantly enhancing their skills, knowledge, and confidence to drive effective community action.
2. **Social Network and Capital Building:** Create and strengthen networks of mutual support within the community, facilitating connections between individuals and groups, promoting community resilience through these connections. Foster environments that promote positive relationships, shared experiences, and collective accomplishments.
3. **Inclusive Practice and Cross-Cultural Bridging:** Develop and implement strategies to ensure meaningful participation of all community members, regardless of their background or abilities. Facilitate understanding and cooperation between different cultural, ethnic, or social groups, creating inclusive spaces that respect and affirm diverse identities.
4. **Supporting Community-Led Initiatives:** Proactively support community groups in initiating, planning, and implementing transformative projects that address local needs and enhance community wellbeing. Ensure initiatives are fundamentally community-owned and sustainably led, positioning the community at the forefront of positive change.
5. **Collaborative Partnership Development:** Purposefully foster and maintain robust, community-centred partnerships among diverse stakeholders. Skilfully negotiate and manage relationships to achieve shared health and wellbeing objectives, always prioritising community voices and leadership in these collaborations.
6. **Navigating Complex Situations:** Understand how to navigate challenging interpersonal and systemic situations while maintaining clear role boundaries. Employ basic de-escalation techniques when appropriate, recognise when to seek support or refer to qualified services, and follow organisational procedures for addressing conflicts. Contribute to positive relationships while clearly understanding the limits of their role in resolving complex situations.
7. **Sustainable Community Capacity Building:** Strategically provide resources and targeted support to enable robust, community-driven project management and long-term community resilience. Actively cultivate and nurture local leadership, fostering the development of self-sustaining community structures that can independently drive ongoing positive change.
8. **Community-Led Framework Implementation:** Consistently apply and advocate for a community-led framework in all aspects of social prescribing. Recognise and amplify the community's pivotal role in defining, enhancing, and sustaining their own wellbeing. Actively shift decision-making power to community members, ensuring their voices and experiences drive the direction of initiatives.

5. Culturally Safe and Inclusive Practice

Social prescribing Link Workers demonstrate expertise in providing culturally safe and inclusive services, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their cultural background, age, or specific needs, can effectively engage with and benefit from social prescribing.

Associated Skills:

1. **Cultural Competence Development:** Continuously expand knowledge about various cultural groups within the community and regularly reflect on and improve cultural safety in social prescribing practice.
2. **Cultural Safety Implementation:** Apply principles of cultural safety in all interactions, including competence in culturally safe practices for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Demonstrate understanding of the historical and ongoing impacts of colonisation on Indigenous communities and create respectful and affirming spaces that recognise the importance of cultural practices, family structures, and community connections.
3. **Inclusive Service Delivery:** Ensure social prescribing activities and programs are accessible and beneficial to all community members, with particular consideration for marginalised or underrepresented groups and adapt practices to accommodate diverse beliefs, histories, traits, and experiences related to culture, ethnicity, race, disability, age, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and religion ensuring equitable access and benefits for all community members.
4. **Digital Literacy and Inclusive Engagement:** Effectively use digital tools while ensuring inclusive practice for those with varying technological access and comfort. Adapt communication methods for different needs, maintain alternative engagement pathways, and support digital inclusion while recognising and addressing technological barriers. Leverage technology appropriately to enhance service delivery and reach underserved populations.
5. **Transcultural Connectivity and Adaptability:** Identify and leverage common interests and shared human experiences to foster connections that transcend cultural boundaries. Demonstrate adaptability in facilitating social prescribing activities that unite diverse groups through universal themes of wellbeing, emphasising our shared humanity while respecting individual cultural identities.

6. Safe and Effective Practice

Social prescribing Link Workers demonstrate expertise in identifying, assessing, and mitigating risks to ensure the safety and wellbeing of participants in social prescribing activities. They maintain ethical standards, adhere to legal requirements, and respond effectively to crisis situations, ensuring all practices are both safe and compliant.

Associated Skills:

1. **Comprehensive Risk Management:** Identify, evaluate, and mitigate potential risks in social prescribing activities, including home visits and community-based activities. Implement and maintain appropriate safety measures, guidelines, and procedures. Ensure robust safeguarding practices and confidentiality protocols are in place and regularly reviewed.
2. **Navigation of Complex Situations:** Identify signs of complex issues, including potential mental health concerns, domestic violence, and elder abuse. Demonstrate knowledge of appropriate referral pathways and reporting procedures. Apply professional judgement to facilitate timely connections to specialised support services while maintaining clear boundaries of the Link Worker role.
3. **Ethical Decision-Making:** Apply ethical frameworks to resolve complex dilemmas in social prescribing contexts. Balance risk management with respect for individual autonomy and dignity, considering multiple stakeholder perspectives.

4. **Legal Compliance and Documentation:** Demonstrate understanding of legal requirements related to social prescribing practice, including proper note-taking and information disclosure. Maintain accurate, legally compliant records of client interactions, ensuring appropriate consent for information sharing and adhering to privacy legislation.
5. **Managing Crises:** Develop and implement emergency response strategies tailored to social prescribing settings and demonstrate readiness to handle emergencies (both medical and non-medical), significant events and natural disasters. Show competence in responding to and managing emergency and crisis situations, employing appropriate interventions and referral pathways as needed.
6. **Adaptive Practice and Safety Enhancement:** Demonstrate flexibility in adjusting risk management and safety practices based on experiences, incidents, and feedback. Provide appropriate support and facilitate reflective learning following challenging events. Regularly assess and update safety protocols, incorporating lessons learned and staying informed about evolving best practices in safe social prescribing. Contribute to the development of improved safety measures that enhance client and practitioner wellbeing.
7. **Conflict Management:** Demonstrate proficiency in identifying, managing, and resolving conflicts at individual, group, and community levels. Apply mediation skills and de-escalation techniques to prevent conflicts from escalating into crises, ensuring diverse voices are heard and respected. Manage and resolve conflicts between individuals, community groups, and local organisations effectively.
8. **Scope Recognition and Referral Navigation:** Understand the boundaries of social prescribing and recognise when clients need additional or alternative support. Maintain knowledge of appropriate referral pathways, particularly for clinical services, and can effectively communicate these boundaries to clients while maintaining supportive relationships. Work collaboratively with other services to enhance client wellbeing within clear professional parameters.

7. Data Management and Evaluation

Social prescribing Link Workers demonstrate expertise in managing data securely and ethically, while effectively evaluating and reporting on the impact of social prescribing initiatives to drive continuous improvement and advocacy.

Associated Skills:

1. **Ethical and Legal Data Management:** Maintain accurate, legally compliant records of interactions and outcomes. Implement secure data practices adhering to privacy laws and organisational policies. Understand and apply legal requirements for data collection, storage, sharing, and consent procedures. Regularly update knowledge of relevant legislation and apply compliance measures in daily practice.
2. **Evidence Collection for Systems Impact:** Systematically document client journeys, experiences, and outcomes using standardised tools and approaches. Capture patterns in social and practical needs, record successful interventions and challenges, and gather client feedback about service experiences. Contribute valuable ground-level insights about service gaps and solutions while maintaining accurate records of community needs and responses.
3. **Feedback Integration:** Implement systems for gathering feedback from service users and partners and integrate feedback into service improvement strategies and program development.
4. **Reflective Practice and Continuous Improvement:** Engage in ongoing self-assessment and learning from experiences. Use evaluation findings and reflective insights to inform future planning and enhance personal competencies and service delivery.

8. Supportive Partnerships and System Change

Social prescribing Link Workers skilfully advocate for individuals and systemic change within health and social care contexts. They address barriers to wellbeing, engage in policy discussions, and build partnerships to enhance social prescribing frameworks and broader health policies.

Associated Skills:

1. **Supportive Partnerships and Advocacy:** Work with individuals to ensure access to services, liaise with providers to accommodate needs, and support applications for services. Identify and address barriers to service access, including informational, physical, transport, financial, and language obstacles.
2. **Aggregating Stories and Data to Identify Systemic Issues:** Identify themes and trends from individual stories and collected data that indicate systemic issues. Analyse and document systemic barriers affecting communities and their environments, considering social, economic, and environmental factors.
3. **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Develop and maintain partnerships across health, social care, community, and environmental sectors to enhance advocacy efforts and drive collaborative change. Create comprehensive support networks and foster collaborative efforts towards systemic improvements.
4. **Awareness and Communication of Policy Impacts:** Stay informed about how policies and funding mechanisms affect client access and outcomes in their community. Identify and document barriers, enablers, and patterns observed in their work, passing on these insights to supervisors or relevant stakeholders to support service improvements and planning.
5. **Local Needs Assessment and Reporting:** Collect and synthesise local needs data and create reports that can be used to inform larger government planning and commissioning structures (e.g., Regional Needs Assessment).
6. **Systemic Understanding and Contribution:** Demonstrate knowledge of broader health and social care systems and their impact on community wellbeing. Identify opportunities for improvement within scope of practice and contribute to positive change through collaborative efforts and evidence-based insights.

9. Integration of Environmental & Contextual Factors in Practice

Social prescribing Link Workers demonstrate expertise in incorporating environmental and contextual considerations into their practice, recognising the interconnectedness between individual wellbeing, community health, and environmental sustainability.

Associated Skills:

1. **Environmental Health and Wellbeing Assessment:** Evaluate how a client's physical and social environment affects their health and wellbeing. Assess the impact of environmental factors on a client's ability to engage in recommended activities. Recognise and document environmental barriers to health and wellbeing at individual and community levels.
2. **Accessibility and Environmental Analysis:** Assess the accessibility of local spaces and activities, considering factors such as mobility, sensory needs, and transportation options. Identify and promote the use of local green spaces for health and wellbeing activities, considering their accessibility and potential health benefits.
3. **Natural Resource Integration and Sustainable Practice:** Incorporate natural environments into social prescribing practices, recognising their role in overall health and wellbeing. Develop social prescriptions that utilise local environmental assets sustainably and promote environmentally friendly community engagement. Integrate respect for the natural world while learning from Indigenous connections to Country.
4. **Environmental Health Awareness:** Understand how environmental factors affect community wellbeing and can connect clients with relevant local environmental programs and green spaces.

Maintain awareness of environmental health impacts while working within their scope to support access to environmentally supportive activities and resources.

Conclusion

These Australian Social Prescribing Link Worker Education Standards represent a foundational step toward establishing a nationally consistent, culturally responsive workforce capable of delivering high-quality social prescribing across Australia's diverse communities. The graduate attributes and core competencies outlined in this document reflect the unique challenges and opportunities of Australia's healthcare landscape, from our vast geography and multicultural communities to our complex funding arrangements and strong tradition of community collaboration.

The standards recognise that effective social prescribing in Australia requires more than technical competence. Link Workers must be ethical practitioners who understand the interconnectedness of individual, community, and environmental wellbeing. They must be skilled communicators who can work respectfully across cultural boundaries, particularly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Most importantly, they must be agents of positive change who can navigate complex systems whilst remaining focused on what matters most to the people they support.

As Australia continues to develop its social prescribing capabilities, these standards will evolve alongside emerging evidence, community feedback, and changing healthcare needs. ASPIRE is committed to regularly reviewing and updating these standards to ensure they remain relevant, practical, and aligned with international best practices whilst maintaining their distinctly Australian character. Through the implementation of these standards, we move closer to ASPIRE's vision of sustainable wellbeing where resilient and connected communities uplift and value all Australians.

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