

SUBMISSION

**Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA)
2027 Consultation Draft**

Community Mental Health Australia

April 2026



Acknowledgement

Community Mental Health Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and pay our respects to Elders.

We recognise their culture, heritage and right to self-determination.

At Community Mental Health Australia, people of all backgrounds, abilities, identities and lived experience are welcome. You will be respected, understood and supported.

Background

The Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publishes the classification of occupations every few years. The current The Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA) was published in 2024.

In preparation for the next version of OSCA to be published in 2027, the ABS has consulted with experts across industry, government, education and training.

In April 2026, Community Mental Health Australia (CMHA) worked with its member organisation Queensland Alliance for Mental Health (QAMH) to submit a request for OSCA 2027 to better reflect the workers within the community mental health sector, in particular Peer Workers.

This is the summary of the submission made by CMHA in April 2026.

Introduction

Community Mental Health Australia (CMHA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to inform the OSCA 2027 Update.

CMHA is the national peak body for the community-managed mental health sector, representing state and territory mental health peaks and, through them, more than 400 community-managed organisations across Australia. These organisations deliver essential psychosocial support services to tens of thousands of people each year.

The community-managed mental health sector supports people living with mental health conditions and psychosocial disability to live well in the community and navigate everyday challenges. The sector has a strong focus on autonomy, rights, recovery, and social participation, enabling individuals to build independence and engage meaningfully in community life. Services are delivered across a range of settings, including in-person individual and group supports, telephone-based services, and, in some cases, online support.

Submission Summary

Current occupational classifications

CMHA members employ staff across a wide range of occupational classifications within OSCA, reflecting the diversity of roles required to deliver community-based mental health services:

Code	Principal Title	Skill Level
121131	Chief Executive or Managing Director	1
141335	Welfare Centre Manager	1
561131	General Clerk	4
441331	Mental Health Workers	2
261331	Social Worker	1
441131	Enrolled Nurse (Mental Health)	2
265434	Registered Nurse (Mental Health)	1
411232	Community Support Worker	2
261231	Psychologist	1
261131	Counsellor	1
422231	Disability Support Worker	4
422131	Disability Services Officer	4

Limitations of existing classifications for community mental health support work

While several OSCA classifications are commonly used to describe roles within the community-managed mental health sector, there is a substantial gap within the existing classifications for community mental health work at the lower Skill Levels.

In practice, classifications such as **Disability Support Worker (422231)** and **Disability Services Officer (422131)** may be applied to roles supporting people with psychosocial disability due to the absence of more appropriate mental health-specific alternatives at lower skill levels. However, these classifications are primarily framed around physical or intellectual disability supports and do not sufficiently recognise the recovery-oriented, relational, and psychosocial focus of community mental health work.

Community mental health support roles require workers to:

- Engage with fluctuating mental health needs and recovery journeys
- Support self-determination, choice, and autonomy

- Work within trauma-informed, recovery-oriented, and strengths-based practice frameworks
- Respond to mental health distress, relapse, and crisis while supporting long-term psychosocial outcomes
- Draw on lived experience as a deliberate and valued workforce capability

These elements are not clearly articulated within existing disability-focused classifications, which can result in:

- Misrepresentation of the skills and responsibilities of the mental health workforce
- Inconsistent workforce data and analysis
- Barriers to appropriate workforce planning, training, and career pathways
- Reduced visibility of lived experience roles as a distinct and essential component of the sector

As a result, current OSCA classifications do not provide an accurate or fit-for-purpose framework for describing the community-managed mental health workforce, particularly at Skill Levels 3 and 4.

Additional occupation or alternative detail

The current occupations do not accurately capture the type of work performed in the community-managed mental health sector at Skill Level 3 and Skill Level 4.

All Skill Levels – Lived experience workforce

The community-managed mental health sector often employs individuals in 'lived experience' roles, where their experiences in living with psychosocial disability is utilised as a professional skill in their occupation. Employers may specify that certain roles require lived experience as a qualifying requirement.

Lived experience is typically associated with:

- 441331 Mental Health Workers
- 261331 Social Worker
- 411232 Community Support Worker
- 422231 Disability Support Worker

However, all roles within the broader community mental health sector may have a lived experience element. CMHA suggests that these roles include an explicit reference to lived experience within the 'Main Tasks' of each occupation, such as:

- **And may involve drawing on lived experience to inform support, engagement, and service delivery**

Skill Level 3 – Mental Health Worker

The work performed by Mental Health Workers, currently identified at Skill Level 2, is typically also performed by workers operating at Skill Level, and with Skill Level 3

qualifications. This is partly because there are no qualifications available at Skill Level 2 (Diploma, Advanced Diploma) for mental health work.

CMHA recommends that classification **441331 Mental Health Worker** be expanded to include Skill Level 3, with no changes to the existing 'Main Tasks'.

422231 – Disability Support Worker

The current wording of the Main Tasks for **422231 Disability Support Worker (Skill Level 4)** does not make explicit that disability includes psychosocial disability, nor does it adequately reflect mental health-specific support work.

In addition, references to terms such as “depression” risk oversimplifying the complexity of mental ill-health, while the phrase “depression, confusion and grief” implies mental health challenges arise secondary to disability rather than recognising psychosocial disability as a primary condition.

Suggested amendments are as follows:

- Provides emotional **and psychosocial support**, and assists in managing **mental health**, ~~depression~~, confusion, and grief
- Manages risks and emergencies, **including mental health emergencies**, in a home care setting
- **Assists people with disability to live independently**

422131 – Disability Services Officer

The existing classification **422131 Disability Support Worker (Skill Level 4)** likely encompasses people who provide support to individuals with psychosocial disability, but this is not apparent through the existing language of the Main Tasks. The Main Tasks should be reframed to ensure that these are explicit that disability includes psychosocial disability.

Suggested amendments are in bold:

- Assesses clients' needs and assists them in planning, implementing and accessing education, training, **housing**, employment, and additional health or welfare programs
- Assists and supports people with disability, **including psychosocial disability**, in all aspects of daily living, including community inclusion, personal care, and building and maintaining independence and interpersonal relationships
- Supports clients to create and work towards their goals, build capacity to make their own decisions and choices, and access services
- **Assists and supports people to live independently in the community**

New classification – Mental Health Support Worker

In addition to the above amendments, CMHA proposes the creation of a new **Mental Health Support Worker** classification at **Skill Level 4**.

This classification would recognise workers delivering direct psychosocial and recovery-oriented support who are not operating at the professional level but play a critical role in service delivery. It would particularly support new entrants to the sector, including those without formal qualifications.

Suggested Main Tasks are as follows:

- Supports people with psychosocial disability with daily activities such as personal care, medication, meal preparation, and attending recovery services
- Assists individuals to implement recovery plans
- Respond to mental health distress or crisis and assist with referrals that align with longer-term psychosocial recovery plans
- Supports clients to build capacity to maintain independence and the ability to make their own decisions and choices
- Provides emotional support to individuals and families
- Facilitates referrals to other useful services in the community
- Implements services and community programs, including through drawing on lived experience, and provides education to families and community groups about mental health issues
- May assist with making appointments and accompanying individuals to appointments or therapy sessions

Conclusion

CMHA looks forward to continuing to work with the Australian Bureau of Statistics to ensure OSCA 2027 reflects the reality of the community-managed mental health workforce. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with officials to discuss these recommendations and the current gaps in occupational recognition. Please contact Kerry Hawkins CEO Community Mental Health Australia to arrange a meeting.