ACWA: Fams

Practice governance framework

A guide for community-based child and family services

Acknowledgement of Country

The Parenting Research Centre, Fams, and ACWA acknowledge and respect the diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this country and the Elders of the past and present.

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Welcome message

Endorsed wholeheartedly by the ACWA and Fams CEOs, this Practice Governance Guide is a groundbreaking step forward in ensuring we remain accountable to the children, young people, families and communities we serve.

Our sector's commitment to high-quality service delivery is unwavering, and this Guide is a testament to that dedication and shared vision: ensuring that every child, young person, and family we support experiences the highest standards of service.

The collaboration between Fams, ACWA and our member organisations has been key to shaping this vision into a practical tool that will further empower organisations to achieve measurable, positive outcomes.

This Guide is about more than meeting standards; it's about driving continuous improvement and demonstrating the positive results achieved through our work.

 By promoting a shared approach to practice governance and emphasising results we hope to inspire and support ground-up transformation within and across our member organisations.

We want to thank the dedicated design team members whose ideas and insights have elevated this resource.

The purpose is clear: to know, prove, and continue making a difference.

Our work is meaningful, and this Guide reflects how we can demonstrate our impact effectively.

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Background

Every day, thousands of dedicated workers in community organisations across Australia work hard to make a real difference in the lives of children, young people, and families.

These workers and the organisations they work for know how important it is to build strong relationships with the people who are seeking support. Ultimately, it is the effectiveness of this engagement that determines how well the organisation supports growth, fosters hope, and empowers people.

The landscape

High-quality practice is everyone's responsibility. Recent Royal Commissions and Inquiries have highlighted the need for organisations to make practice quality a top priority, emphasising that accountability is vital and must be upheld by everyone, from the board through to frontline practitioners.[1]

Practice governance is an approach an organisation can use to put practice quality at the centre of everything it does.

Practice governance originated from clinical governance, which emerged in the 1990s to ensure that patients received safe, high-quality care and is now widely used in healthcare.[2]

Practice governance provides a more tailored and meaningful approach for community-based child and family services because it:

- recognises that 'social' care focuses on connecting and building relationships, rather than more tangible medical processes, which means different approaches are needed for defining and measuring high-quality care
- uses terms, ideas, methods, and tools that fit the context and needs of 'social' care services
- supports the delivery and improvement of evidence-based practices more broadly, rather than being specific to clinical or medical care.

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[1] Examples: The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017), the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2023), the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2021), the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government's Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings (2023), and the Systematic Inquiry into Services for Young People Transitioning from Out-of-home Care (2020)

[2] Vanu Som (2004)

As practice governance evolves in the social services sector, some key priorities are emerging:

- **Move beyond quality assurance:** Effective organisations aim for more than just meeting standards and requirements, they seek to strengthen and elevate practice. Practice governance is the key to ongoing improvement.

- **Support 'ground-up' transformation:** Real and lasting change happens organisations when value and harness the ideas and skills of practitioners. Practice governance boosts ground-up change by actively involving those at the frontline, benefiting both practitioners and families.

- **Evidence-based and outcomes-focused:** The sector is committed to identifying and implementing evidence of 'what works.' Practice governance helps organisations stay accountable by defining and measuring their outcomes, being clear about what is being done and the results, and using this data to drive improvement.

The opportunity

There is growing interest in how practice governance can help create learning organisations that are constantly improving outcomes for children and families. Now is the time to combine our knowledge, experience, skills, and ideas as a sector to collectively strengthen practice governance.

Effective practice governance requires careful planning and action. A practice governance framework is the starting point for an organisation, as it illustrates what high-quality practice looks like and how it will be achieved.

The aim

In 2024, the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA), Fams, and the Parenting Research Centre (PRC) teamed up to develop a guide for developing a practice governance framework for ACWA and Fams member organisations. The guide also aims to create a shared language and ideas for the sector to further enhance collaboration.

How this guide was developed

This guide was created through a collaborative process with two phases:

Phase 1: Exploration

The PRC:

- Consulted with Fams and ACWA member organisations

- Reviewed relevant documents from participating organisations

- Examined published practice governance frameworks in social care and related research to identify the key components of practice frameworks.

Phase 2: Design

The PRC worked with two design teams formed through an expression of interest process. One team included Fams members, and the other consisted of ACWA members.

These teams brought together people from various organisations, each at different stages in developing their practice governance approaches.

The teams developed the guide during several design workshops between March and August 2024.

About this guide

This guide can be used by each member organisation to develop a practice governance framework that reflects their unique service user and community needs, environment, and ways of working. It is intended to help those who are just starting out on the practice governance journey, as well as those seeking to review and strengthen their approach.

Intended audience

This guide is for organisational leaders and staff who are responsible for developing and/or reviewing their organisation's practice governance framework.

Overview of this guide

This guide is divided into nine chapters. An overview of the content is provided below:

Chapter 1	An overview of practice governance and the purpose of a practice governance framework.
Chapter 2	A high-level overview of the five key components of a practice governance framework, followed by key considerations for developing a framework.
Chapters 3–7	Each of the five key components of a practice governance framework is explained, with guidance on how to develop each in a framework.
Chapter 8	An explanation of how to bring all the components together to finalise a framework, along with adding introductory and glossary sections to a framework.
Chapter 9	Introductory information for organisations who have a practice governance framework in place and are ready to start planning, designing, or upgrading their accompanying practice governance system. Some brief information about a practice governance system is also included in other chapters where relevant.
Appendices	**Frequently Asked Questions** A resource an organisation can use to support stakeholder engagement, communications, and buy-in about practice governance. **Asset Mapping Tool** A tool an organisation can use to identify existing assets (e.g. documents, tools, plans) that may help develop each component of its framework. **Glossary** Definitions of key terms in this resource.

Terminology

This guide uses the term **service users** to refer to those who receive services offered by an organisation (i.e. clients, consumers). While **practice governance** is used here, some organisations may decide another term is the best fit when naming their framework (e.g. clinical governance, quality governance).

Organisations have different preferences for the terminology they use in relation to service delivery. Each organisation can adapt the language and key terms of its framework to its own philosophy and beliefs.

1. Practice governance: an overview

This chapter gives an overview of practice governance and its key concepts, benefits, and where it fits in an organisation. It also outlines steps to help an organisation get started on its practice governance journey and to develop its approach over time.

What is practice governance?

Practice governance is the way an organisation supports and improves the quality of practice, aiming for better outcomes for service users and communities.

Practice governance makes practice quality the focus of everything the organisation does, engaging everyone in an effort to provide the best care and services possible. It aims to:

- foster a shared commitment to achieving high-quality practice
- explain, show, and share what high-quality practice looks like
- support the delivery of high-quality practice
- routinely measure what is being done and what is being achieved, using this information to improve outcomes for service users
- ensures accountability for practice quality by identifying the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved.

Six key concepts related to practice governance in community-based services are outlined here.

1. Practice is the focus

Practice governance helps an organisation understand, monitor, and improve practice—the intentional connection and relationship building with someone to achieve an outcome.

Outcomes are the specific results or changes a program aims to achieve for service users.[3] When practice is effective, a program can achieve the outcomes it seeks. When practice is ineffective, it can hinder good outcomes for service users, and even cause harm.

2. High-quality practice is the goal

If practice is defined in relation to the outcomes that are sought for service users, then 'quality' is judged by how well practice helps achieve those outcomes.

Each organisation must define what high-quality practice looks like for its programs and services, using the best-available evidence of effective ways for achieving results.

Organisations also have values and beliefs that shape how they want to work with people. How well practice matches these values and beliefs is also an important part of practice quality.

3. Practice quality is everyone's business

An important idea in practice governance is that everyone in the organisation, not just practitioners, has a role in making sure practice is effective. Practitioners need to have the right professional skills and training to deliver quality practice, but the efforts of everyone, from the board to support staff, are needed to create an environment that helps every practitioner do their best work.

4. Continuous improvement is the foundation

Practice governance is grounded in the ideas and methods of continuous improvement. Continuous improvement is an ongoing process where organisations, teams, or individuals regularly review their work and make small, gradual changes to improve practice quality. It involves constantly looking for ways to make things better, to achieve better outcomes over time.

Only an improvement approach that engages 'hearts and minds' and moves beyond following rules and regulations will help an organisation to achieve high-quality practice. This approach also reduces risk and helps organisations to meet their ethical and legal obligations (e.g. legislation, contracts, industry standards, certifications).

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[3] It's important not to confuse 'outcomes' with 'outputs'; outputs are activities a program does or achieves to help reach its outcomes, but outcomes are the results of those activities for service users or communities. Examples of outcomes and outputs are included in the Glossary.

5. Boosting openness and accountability

Through practice governance, an organisation fosters collective ownership of its results and establishes clear lines of responsibility for delivering real, measurable improvements to service users and communities. At its core, accountability involves accepting responsibility for actions and their outcomes.

True accountability requires transparency and openness, including communication of program goals and routine monitoring of processes and outcomes. By using this data to maximise service effectiveness and efficiency, and regularly reporting to stakeholders, an organisation demonstrates its commitment to continuous improvement. It is not enough to aim for better practice—an organisation must also be able to show stakeholders that progress is being made.

6. Practice governance as the everyday 'way of working'

Practice governance is how an organisation makes sure its day-to-day efforts are focused on delivering the best possible quality of work. Ideally, it becomes the way staff do their jobs, not an extra administrative burden (e.g. the way a manager will improve the quality of their program).

Establishing practice governance

Practice governance is a dynamic, ongoing process that an organisation develops and improves over time. It defines an organisation's values and goals in working with people, then establishes a 'line of sight' between practice and the outcomes for service users.

The connection between practice and outcomes is best understood at the program level. In this guide, a **program** refers to a structured set of activities that have been designed to achieve specific outcomes or goals; examples of programs include child and family services, out-of-home care, aged care, and disability, as each of these are made up of coordinated activities that work towards fulfilling a particular goal.

Creating a line of sight between practice and outcomes requires everyone—from the board to practitioners— to regularly reflect on these key questions for each program an organisation delivers:

1. Do we know the outcomes we want this program to achieve?

2. Do we have a plan for how the program will achieve the intended changes?

3. Are we carrying out our plan effectively?

4. Are our service users actively engaged in the change process?

5. Do we see the early changes that show we are on track to reach the intended outcomes?

6. Are we achieving the outcomes we are aiming for?

Practice governance also involves improving the quality of practice. This means regularly reflecting on these extra questions:[4]

1. How accurate and trustworthy is our information, and how can we make it better?

2. What has worked well, and how do we know it reflects high-quality practice?

3. Where can we improve?

4. How will we know if we are improving?

5. What actions are we taking to make improvements?

6. What have we learned from our improvement efforts so far?

Concentrating on these questions can help coordinate and unify the efforts of everyone in the organisation. They communicate clear focus areas, allowing everyone to gather and analyse the right information. The questions also provide an underlying structure to guide the collection, interpretation, and decision making in relation to data. For example, if service users are not engaging with the change process in a program, it makes sense to first ask whether the program plan is being implemented effectively.

These questions will always stay relevant. As an organisation's working environment and knowledge of what high-quality practice looks like evolves, so will the answers to these questions. An organisation does not need sophisticated, complex data or information systems to start engaging with these questions, but improving the quality and reliability of data used to guide practice improvement reflects increasing maturity in practice governance.

Benefits of practice governance

Practice governance provides many benefits at the service user, practice, workforce, and organisational levels. These include:

Service user

- Service users have a similar experience when interacting with the organisation, regardless of the specific program stream or service
- Stronger outcomes for service users through the delivery of effective programs and services.

Practice

- Drive 'ground-up' practice transformation by harnessing the ideas and skills of frontline practitioners to achieve lasting improvements
- Help leaders to monitor and understand the quality of practice, and to see how its investments in practice development relate to improved outcomes for service users

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[4] Adapted from Life Without Barriers (2023)

- Support decision-making about practice development based on accurate and reliable data.
- Make practice more efficient and effective, allowing the organisation to do more and support more people.

Staff

- Boost staff engagement, motivation, and well-being by focusing organisational efforts on building skills, confidence and effectiveness in their practice
- Help to create a positive work environment that encourages growth, change, learning, flexibility, and staff retention.

Organisation

- Provide the framework and systems to support a whole-of-organisation focus on practice support and improvement
- Help the organisation focus on outcomes and better share its impact, including to meet funders' growing expectations for outcomes reporting
- Guide the organisation in streamlining data collection and reporting to reduce unnecessary work and ensure all organisational levels receive what is 'most useful' to drive improvement
- Attract and develop good leaders by defining the skills and actions needed to improve quality
- Bring together and make the most of the organisation's systems to ensure high-quality practice
- Ensure necessary compliance and quality checks are part of a larger plan to improve and maintain practice quality
- Align with advice from national commissions and inquiries by giving boards a clear view of how services are delivered and what results they achieve
- Uphold transparency for key stakeholders about what outcomes the organisation is achieving.

The role of a practice governance framework

Organisations usually begin their practice governance journey by creating a practice governance framework.

A **practice governance framework** explains how an organisation will drive continuous improvement in practice. It is the blueprint that guides the development and implementation of everyday activities, processes and systems for supporting practice.

Practice governance connects an organisation's vision, values, purpose, and strategy with the operation of its programs and services (see Figure 1). A practice governance framework helps ensure that different programs and services work in a consistent way and follow a unified approach to improving practices and getting better results for service users.

In this guide, a **program** refers to a structured set of activities that have been designed to achieve specific outcomes or goals; examples of programs include child and family services, out-of-home care, aged care, and disability, as each of these are made up of coordinated activities that work towards fulfilling a particular goal.

A practice governance framework sets the overarching goals and principles for all the organisation's programs. Program-specific practice models and frameworks then translate these principles into practical steps and actions that achieve the intended outcomes for service users. A practice governance framework also guides an organisation as it chooses or develops program-specific practice models and frameworks.

Practice governance does not work alone; it needs to work together with other systems and processes, such as managing risks, compliance, finances, and human resources.
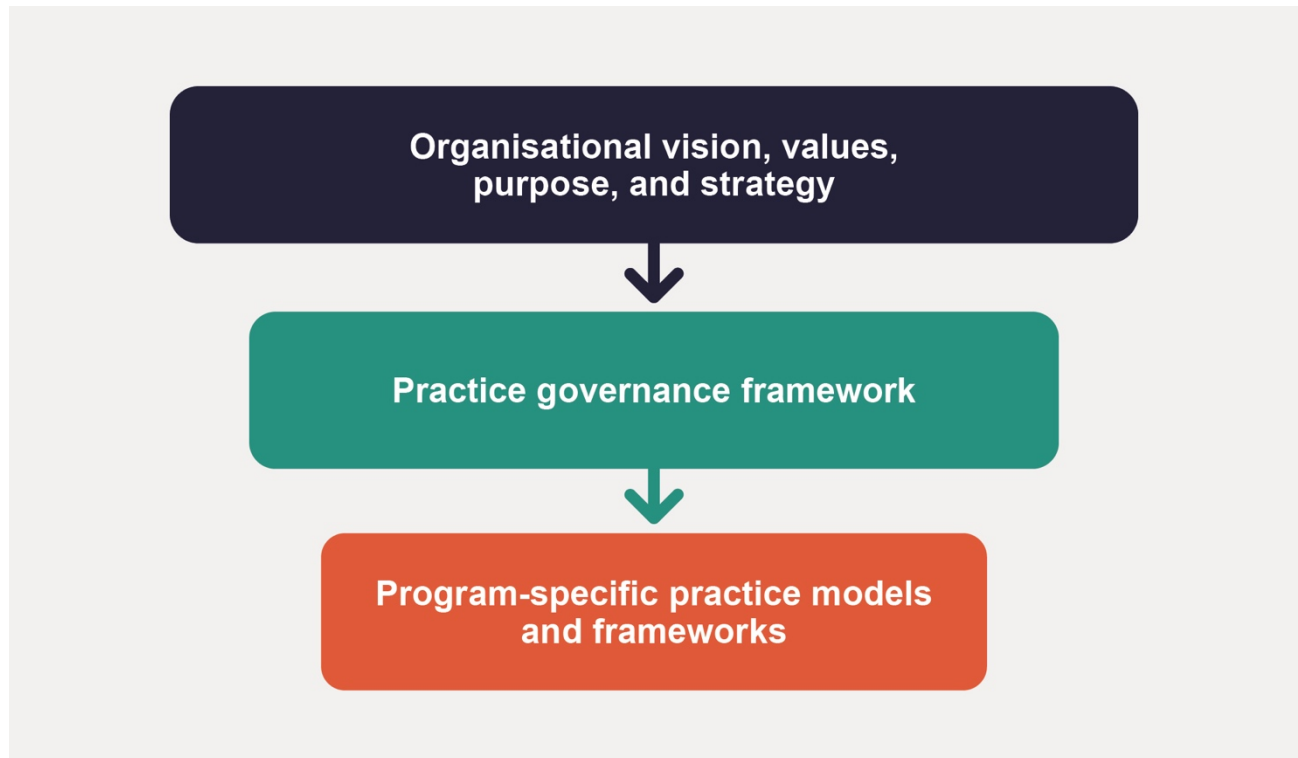
Figure 1. The position of a practice governance framework in an organisation

Practice governance does not work alone; it needs to work together with other systems and processes, such as managing risks, compliance, finances, and human resources. Organisations should plan, monitor, and keep improving their approach to practice governance, just like they do with other areas of organisational governance.

Steps to practice governance

While setting up practice governance and putting it into action is a significant task for any organisation, it is an achievable one that leads to many benefits.

With sufficient dedication, resources, and time, organisations can successfully design and implement their approach, paving the way for long-term success and improvement.

It can be helpful to approach practice governance step-by-step, starting small and building over time.

Key steps include:

1. **Understanding the organisation's level of readiness:** This focuses on understanding how ready the organisation is to adopt practice governance and identifying any current initiatives that might support its development.

   For example, are leadership, executives, and the board interested in exploring new approaches to enhance practice? Or is the organisation looking to move beyond compliance and funding obligations, aiming for innovation and a higher quality of practice?

   Wherever an organisation might be in terms of its readiness should not prevent it from working towards a practice governance approach. Instead, this should empower it to understand its current position and identify its next steps to progress its journey. This guide can help with early conversations and building motivation for a practice governance approach.

2. **Develop the practice governance framework:** This is the 'blueprint' for how an organisation will carry out practice governance. Developing a framework is the focus of this guide.

3. **Design the practice governance system:** This step involves identifying activities and processes that will turn the practice governance framework (the 'blueprint') into action.

   A detailed discussion about the practice governance system is beyond the scope of this guide, but some introductory information is included in Chapter 9 to help those at that point in the journey to make a start. Where relevant, brief information about the system is also included at other points in this guide.

4. **Put the practice governance system into action:** This involves getting the system 'up and running' and monitoring how well it works.

5. **Regularly review and improve the practice governance framework and system:** This consists of regularly checking, updating, and improving the system and framework as the organisation's needs and environment change.

The uniqueness of the organisation, including its size, number of programs and services, and its available resources, will dictate the amount of time needed to develop and implement a tailored approach. This process can take years—not weeks or months. It is important to state this upfront to minimise any pressure or overwhelming feelings that may get in the way of the organisation embarking on this process.

As an organisation begins to work on its practice governance approach, it will start to see links between practice governance, its day-to-day work, and its available resources. These links will help it develop a meaningful and achievable framework and system that can be put into action. Where relevant, this guide highlights the links between day-to-day activities and practice governance.

2. Developing a practice governance framework

This chapter introduces the five key components you should include in your practice governance framework. It then highlights key points to consider when developing your framework.

Components of your framework

Your practice governance framework should consist of **five key components.** If you wish, these can also be presented as the main sections of a document that describes your framework. These five components are:

Leadership and culture	**Details how your organisation will grow and nurture the right leadership and cultural conditions for achieving real and lasting practice improvement.** **How to describe it:** Use a series of statements and/or paragraphs to highlight the important beliefs, values, and behaviours that your organisation views as essential for continuous practice improvement. Your description should also refer to your organisation's commitment to promoting this culture and leadership.
Vision for a practice	**States how your organisation aims to work with people in a way that aligns with its core beliefs, values, and purpose.** **How to describe it:** A statement of your organisation's vision for practice, which describes its aspirations for how it works with people. It should align with your organisation's identity, values, and purpose. The statement can be a few sentences or several paragraphs.
Practice principles	**A set of organisation-wide practice principles that define what high-quality practice looks like for everyone in your organisation. These principles unite the organisation by guiding decision and actions.** **How to describe it:** Each practice principle includes a brief statement that explains how it guides and informs practice.

Levers of practice quality	**Details how your organisation will support and improve its quality of practice through its tools and processes.** **How to describe it:** Briefly define a 'lever of practice quality', followed by a list of the main levers your organisation will focus on to drive improvement. For each lever, include a few sentences explaining what it means and how it will improve practice quality.
Roles and responsibilities	**Explains how each person in your organisation contributes to delivering high-quality practice.** **How to describe it:** List the relevant roles, like practitioners, the board, and service users. For each, provide a short description of their main roles and responsibilities that help deliver high-quality practice

In Chapters 3 to 7 that follow, you will find each of these five key components explained in detail in its own chapter. Each chapter also gives guidance on developing that component of your framework and some practical examples. This information can also be used by organisations who already have a framework but wish to review and strengthen their approach.

Following the chapters on the five key components, you will find guidance in Chapter 8 about what to include in an introductory section and a glossary section to finalise your framework.

A suggested 'roadmap' for developing your framework is provided in Figure 2.
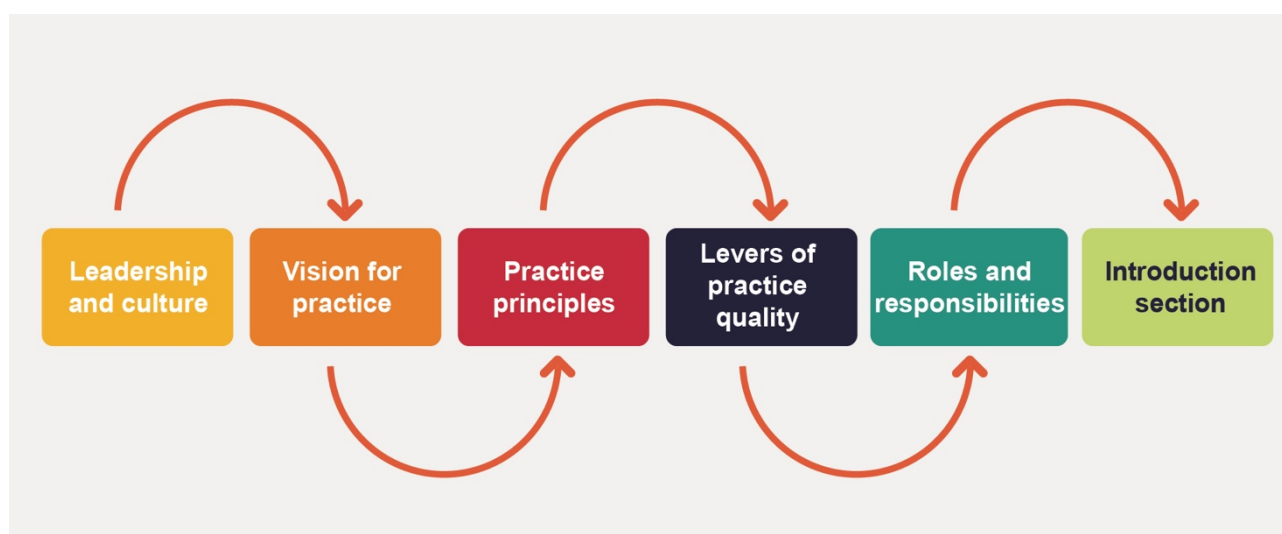

Figure 2. The roadmap to your practice governance framework

Considerations when developing your framework

As you use this guide to develop or strengthen your practice governance framework, keep these key points in mind:

- **Scaling practice governance:** Any organisation, no matter the size, can manage practice governance effectively. Different sizes and complexities bring unique strengths and challenges. Where relevant, we offer suggestions for adapting your approach based on key characteristics of your organisation.

- **Customisation:** Adjust this guidance to fit your organisation's specific context, resources, client needs, and overall governance approach. This could mean changing the format, content, or language used in your framework to suit your organisation's philosophy and culture. You can also modify the 'example components' from this guide, but remember, the true value of your framework comes from how well your organisation 'owns' and applies it.

- **Building on what you have:** Use your organisation's existing assets to help develop your framework, such as its strategy, vision, values, and core practice approaches (e.g. practice frameworks, models, or principles). Bringing these elements together creates a great foundation for your framework.

- **Your document:** There's no single 'right way' to present your framework. The length and detail will depend on your organisation's needs. The key is to engage and inform everyone in the organisation in a way that will be meaningful to their role and work.

- **Living document:** Treat your framework as a 'work in progress,' updating it regularly as your organisation grows and changes. Your first version doesn't need to be perfect—what matters most is getting started.

- **Implementation:** Practice governance involves coordinated actions. Your framework is a plan to guide these actions, but careful planning will be needed to make sure the actions happen. Planning how you will implement your framework is the next step. This document doesn't cover how to implement your framework. But the process of developing your framework will likely raise crucial insights that will help with its implementation.

- **Timeframe:** Developing and implementing a practice governance framework is important but not urgent. It will involve an investment of time. The time you spend planning and involving stakeholders will pay off when you are ready to implement. The important thing to keep in mind is that you can start small and build over time as resources allow.

- **Communication:** Communicating your framework, both internally and externally, is crucial. This document and your framework will provide useful content, but you may need extra communication tools for stakeholders to bring them on the journey. A 'Practice Governance Frequently Asked Questions' document is provided in Appendix A to help with communication in your organisation. Active conversations will go a long way in building buy-in and helping staff at all levels to understand what practice governance means for their work.

- **Use your networks:** Learn from others' experiences. Make use of your networks to help you develop your framework.

- **Stakeholder engagement:** The practicality and usefulness of your framework depend on how much you engage and consult with key stakeholders. Involving stakeholders early will result in a better designed framework and save time and costs during implementation.

- **Models of governance:** Practice governance should be part of your organisation's overall governance approach. Since there are different governance styles, you may need to adjust the guidance in this document to fit your organisation's specific style.

3. Leadership and culture

The 'Leadership and culture' component outlines the beliefs, values, and behaviours that your organisation believes are essential for improving practice. This should be seen as the core of what your organisation stands for and lives by.

Continuous improvement is the foundation of practice governance. Many social service organisations aim to go beyond meeting basic standards and requirements, to achieving real and lasting practice improvement.[5] But reaching this means creating the right leadership and cultural conditions,[6] which include embracing ongoing learning, adapting to change, just treatment of others, and upholding staff wellbeing.

Leaders play a crucial role by:

- building a shared commitment, accountability, and a sense of urgency to improve outcomes for service users by continuously improving practice

- demonstrating curiosity, openness and willingness to embrace learning and change (i.e. role modelling adaptive 'mindsets'[7])

- fostering the cultural conditions needed for your organisation and its workforce to grow, change, and adapt (e.g. openness, safety, fairness)

- cultivating a shared sense of accountability through improved measurement and greater transparency in the effectiveness of service delivery and its outcomes for service users.

- leveraging your organisation's systems, processes, and policies to create the right cultural conditions for achieving high quality practice

- identifying and managing factors that 'work against' the type of culture and values your organisation sees as essential to helping it improve practice.

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[5] Safer Care Victoria (2018)

[6] An organisation's culture includes the beliefs, values, and guidelines that help everyone know how to work together.

[7] A mindset refers to shared 'ways of thinking' within an organisation, such as beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes.

How the components connect

- Your key learnings from developing this **leadership and culture** component will help you start to clarify your **roles and responsibilities** (Chapter 7) in practice governance by describing the type and quality of leadership your organisation needs to improve practice

- The **leadership and culture** component links to your **levers of practice quality** (Chapter 6). You can draw on the levers you prioritise to help you achieve the cultural features you are aiming for.

What to include

Developing this component of your framework means identifying and describing the type of culture and leadership your organisation believes will help it improve practice (see Example: leadership and culture). You should also emphasise your organisation's commitment to fostering the right culture and leadership. You can draw on the 'four dimensions of organisational culture' below to develop this component.

The four dimensions of organisational culture

There are four dimensions of organisational culture that underpin practice improvement: just, wellbeing, learning, and adaptive (see Figure 3). These dimensions are inter-related and influence each other. For example, if mistakes and feedback are seen as opportunities to learn and improve (just), then this encourages staff to 'take risks' for the benefit of trying new approaches, learning, and innovating (adaptive). All four are equally important for establishing a culture that supports practice improvement.

Figure 3. The four dimensions of organisational culture that underpin practice improvement

Here we describe each of the four dimensions in detail.

Just culture

When your organisation's leaders create a workplace where staff feel treated fairly and safe, staff are more likely to speak up about their concerns and to talk about mistakes. This increases and makes the most of opportunities to improve.[8]

The features of a just culture include:

- clear, honest, and open communication

- respectful towards others

- fair and equal treatment

- individuals and your organisation share responsibility for practice

- everyone feels safe to 'speak up' and reflect about issues or concerns without fearing blame, shame, or punishment

- seeing mistakes and feedback as opportunities to learn and improve[8]

- widening your organisation's focus to the contribution of environments and systems, rather than just focusing on the individuals involved and their role (e.g. during incident investigations)

- dealing swiftly and decisively with reckless, or unlawful behaviour that goes against your organisation's code of conduct.

Wellbeing culture

Staff wellbeing and practice quality are linked. A wellbeing culture focuses on meeting the emotional and physical needs of staff, so they are safe and healthy to do the work.[9] By taking action to reduce staff stress and burnout, your organisation builds a positive environment where staff can thrive and consistently deliver high-quality practice.

The features of a wellbeing culture include:

- everyone recognises the impact that caring-related work can have on staff, especially frontline practitioners, and makes active efforts to help each other stay strong, resilient and hopeful

- leaders proactively implement strategies that help staff find purpose and satisfaction in their work[10] and optimise wellbeing (e.g. supporting work life balance)

- staff opinions are asked for, valued, and used to shape efforts for improving wellbeing and practice

- staff wellbeing is actively monitored, and actions are taken that will make a real diffference[9]

- leaders anticipate and address issues that can cause burnout, low spirits, and 'turnover' in staff.

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[8] Boysen (2013); Safer Care Victoria (2022); Yooralla (2023)

[9] Commission on Excellence and Innovation in Health (2023)

[10] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine et al. (2018)

Learning culture

To keep improving practice and meeting the changing needs of communities, your organisation must nurture and empower a skilled workforce. Creating a learning culture is key to building the knowledge and abilities of staff.[11]

The features of a learning culture include:

- learning is essential, highly valued, and important in everything that is done at every level (i.e. individual, team, program, organisation)

- learning is part of your organisation's strategy, values, resourcing, and systems[12]

- your organisation and leadership are invested in helping staff to grow and improve in their practice, going beyond just checking if standards and being met (e.g. competencies)

- mistakes are seen as a natural and important part of learning, offering chances to change and get better

- everyone recognises and celebrates progress and successes, whilst focusing on 'what is working' and using these learnings to drive practice improvement

- everyone is dedicated to using evidence (e.g. data) to guide actions and decisions.

Adaptive culture

An adaptive culture supports your organisation to transform and improve, including in how it practices. This helps it not only survive, but to stay impactful and responsive to community needs. It also encourages staff to 'take risks' with the goal of trying new approaches, learning, and innovating.[13]

The features of an adaptive culture include:

- ongoing reflection about practice and the work, with an aim to 'elevate' how things are done[12]

- a willingness to question the usual way of doing things (i.e. to challenge 'business as usual')

- actively looking out for changes, 'threats,' or opportunities in the broader environment, then responding to these quickly and flexibly[12] (examples could include changes in funding, requirements (e.g. safeguarding standards, funding, contractual), policy, research, and society)

- leadership value and encourage curiosity, creativity, and openness to new ideas[14]

- expecting and welcoming ongoing changes over time, and recognising that change and flexibility helps your organisation stay effective, impactful, and long-lasting.[12]

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[11] CIPD (2020)

[12] Boysen (2013); Safer Care Victoria (2022); Yooralla (2023)

[13] CIPD (2020); Costanza, Blacksmith, Coats, Severt, & DeCostanza (2016)

[14] Costanza et al. (2016)

Example: leadership and culture

Our top priority is to provide effective, high-quality practice. Achieving this goal requires strong leadership at all levels of our organisation, inspiring and supporting everyone to keep learning and improving.

We can only have this kind of leadership if our organisation's culture supports it to flourish. We understand that creating a healthy culture takes planning and ongoing effort.

We need a fair, supportive work environment that values wellbeing, encourages learning, and adapts to change. Our leaders will shape this culture by living our organisation's values and 'leading by example' in their beliefs, actions, and decisions. They will also build this culture by creating systems and processes that match our values and goals.

We are committed to:

Upholding staff wellbeing
- We acknowledge that high-quality practice is tied to staff wellbeing, and create the conditions that support staff to stay resilient and maintain a 'sense of purpose' in their work
- We seek the opinions of staff and use these to inform wellbeing and practice improvement efforts

A just and fair environment
- We create a safe and trusting environment where everyone feels confident to 'speak up'
- We view mistakes as chances to learn and improve, not reasons for blame
- We are clear and honest about what we do and what we have achieved, using this information to improve our work

Continuous learning and improvement
- We are driven by lifelong learning and growth, including in relation to how our organisation is run
- Everyone in the organisation has the power to be involved in efforts to improve and increase our impact
- We work with enthusiasm, determination, and urgency to make improvements
- We listen to, and learn from, the people we serve to better meet their needs
- We are humble, honest, and clear in our communications about what is and isn't working
- We celebrate our successes and learn from them, just as much as we address mistakes and setbacks

Evolving and adapting
- We are open to new ideas and feedback, rather than defending the way things have always been done
- We stay curious and thoughtful when things 'go wrong' or when thinking about opportunities for change and development
- We use the 'best available' information and data to guide our decisions and practice, so we keep improving and are transparent in what we do and the outcomes we achieve.

How to develop this component

Steps

1. **Think about why your organisation is engaging in practice governance:**

   - What are the main reasons and goals driving this decision?
   - How do these reasons and goals connect with the personal motivations of those in your organisation? (e.g. motivations like wanting to make a real difference in the lives of service users and communities)

2. **Think about what your organisation's overall vision, goals, and values:**

   - What do they say about the kind of culture your organisation believes is important to achieving its goals? How can this be applied to practice governance?

3. **Consider the four dimensions of culture and their features:**

   - What are your organisation's current strengths?
   - What are the areas for improvement?
   - What features does your organisation want to aim for?
   - What would achieving them look like in your organisation?

4. **Ask relevant stakeholders** what features of leadership and culture help your organisation learn and improve in its practice. You can use some of the sample questions below to get started with those in your organisation. You will need to introduce the 'four dimensions of culture' to set the scene and guide the conversation.

5. **Write the features of leadership and culture** that your organisation believes are the foundations of its approach to practice governance. Be sure to explain why they are important, as this will help get everyone in your organisation on board the journey.

6. **Test the description** with relevant stakeholders if needed. Then adjust and finalise.

7. **Include the description** of the features of leadership and culture in your framework.

Other considerations

- Talking about culture and leadership across your organisation will take time but will support genuine 'buy-in' from leaders and staff. It will also unite everyone in working towards achieving the cultural environment and leadership that are being aimed for.

- This component should help your organisation to choose and develop the leaders it needs by giving clear guidance about the desired organisational culture and the necessary qualities, actions, and roles of leaders.

- If your organisation has existing documents about leadership and/or culture, consider how these align with this component and how you can use these to help develop this part of your framework.

- Think about similarities between how your organisation wants staff to interact with service users, and how your organisation and its leaders want to support staff development. A powerful impact is possible when leaders 'model' important skills with staff, as staff can then bring those same skills to improve practice.

4. Vision for practice

A vision for practice describes your organisation's aspirations for how it works with people. It reflects your organisation's identity, values, and purpose.

A vision for practice creates a shared direction and 'way of thinking' in relation to practice and improvement efforts. It also communicates your organisation's practice-related goals to others, helping them know what to expect and attracting like-minded employees and partners.

A vision for practice is more specific than the overall organisational vision because it 'zooms in' on practice itself and the relationships between your organisation and the people it serves. In contrast, the organisational vision concentrates on your organisation's broad high-level goals, such as what outcomes it wants to see and what being 'successful' would look like.

Your vision for practice will be in line with and support your organisation's overall vision.What to include

This component provides a statement of your organisation's vision for practice. The statement can be a few sentences or several paragraphs (see Examples: vision for practice). While keeping it short is helpful, what matters most is that it inspires, motivates, and informs everyone in relation to your organisation's aspirations for practice.

Make sure that your vision for practice applies to all program streams and services. It should describe the experience that all service users should have, no matter which part of your organisation they interact with.

The statement should also capture the unique voice of your organisation. Use words that resonate with staff and fit with your organisation's purpose, values, and context.

How to develop this component

Steps

8. **Think about what your organisation's overall vision, goals, and values** mean for its practice. For example, what kind of practice is needed to reach your organisation's vision?

    You could also consider:

    - core organisational beliefs

    - core approaches to practice (e.g. person-centred care that aims to empower)

    - features of the 'four dimensions of organisational culture' that are particularly important to your organisation.

9. **Ask relevant stakeholders,** such as staff and service users, about what they think is important in how your organisation interacts with the people it works with. You may use some of the sample questions in the following box.

10. **Write the vision for practice statement.**

11. **Test and adjust this statement** if needed by getting input from relevant stakeholders.

12. **Add the final statement to your framework.**

Sample questions to explore with stakeholders

For those in your organisation

- What values should guide how we work with people?

- How do we want to interact with service users?

- What kind of experience do we want people to have when they interact with us?

- What does high quality practice look like within the programs and services we deliver?

Service users

- How do you want to be treated by this organisation?

- What is the most important thing about the way we work with you?

- What kind of relationship do you want with the people in this organisation?

Communities

- How should people be treated when they come to this organisation?

- How should people and communities feel when they talk with this organisation?

Partner and funding organisations

- What do your interactions with this organisation tell you about what it values and prioritises?

- What do you want to feel and experience when you interact with this organisation?

- What should service users and communities feel and experience when they work with this organisation?

Other considerations

- Your organisation's leaders will need to take charge of developing and sharing the vision for practice. But it is important to get input from stakeholders inside and outside your organisation; this makes sure the statement is meaningful and motivating.

- By taking the time to consult with staff to shape the vision for practice, you can give your organisation a strategic edge; this can spark important conversations about practice governance and boost interest, motivation, and commitment.

- When developing a vision for practice, it may not always be possible to reach full agreement from everyone. It's important to be clear with stakeholders about the process, how information gathered will be used, and who will make the final decisions.

- Your organisation can choose whose perspective its vision for practice will be 'framed from' (e.g. from the viewpoint of your organisation; person-led from the viewpoint of service users).

Extra tips for adjusting to fit your organisation

- **Make sure each 'how to' step above is tailored to fit what is realistic** for your organisation (e.g. available time, resources, organisational size and complexity, existing documents that can be drawn on, nature of stakeholder input). It's also okay to re-visit or add steps if needed.

- **If your organisation has fewer 'layers' between leaders, staff, and service users (**this usually happens in small or medium-sized organisations), you may decide to develop the statement in less formal ways (e.g. adding discussions to develop the statement into existing meetings).

- **If time and resources are tight,** consider developing the vision for practice and practice principles at the same time given they complement each other. This can help you get the most out of your efforts at each main step (e.g. talk to stakeholders on both topics in the one session).

- **If your organisation has multiple program streams and services,** think about how you will engage with relevant stakeholders across these. Creating a small team to manage the development and writing process may help.

5. Practice principles

Practice principles define what high-quality practice looks like for everyone in your organisation. These shared principles outline the essential features of quality practice, uniting your organisation by guiding decision and actions.

A set of practice principles help your organisation create consistency in the way its different programs work with people. They can also help you to choose or develop program-level practice frameworks and models that will fit your organisation's shared approach.

Practice principles support high-quality practice by:

- **Guiding actions and decision making:** Clear and well-understood principles can help everyone when making decisions and taking action in 'real time,' especially practitioners when specific practice guidance is not available.

- **Uniting improvement efforts:** Principles help everyone in your organisation come together in their efforts to improve practice by providing focus points and guiding decisions.

- **Supporting clear communication:** Having a shared understanding of 'high-quality practice' helps everyone in your organisation communicate better by creating a 'common language.' Principles also let service users, partners, and funders know what they can expect from your organisation.

- **Enhancing staff development:** Principles give everyone a 'frame of reference' to work towards in their learning and growth. They help staff to self-reflect on their practice and work, identify strengths, and find growth opportunities, whether it be at the individual, team, or organisational level.

- **Aligning actions with evidence:** Principles can be evidence-informed, while also allowing enough flexibility for staff to tailor their approaches to their context and service users.

How the components connect

- While a **vision for practice** outlines your organisation's high-level aspirations and 'direction' for practice, **practice principles** communicate what high-quality practice looks like.

- Your **practice principles** describe how your **vision for practice** will be achieved.

What to include

This component of your framework states your organisation's practice principles. Each principle should be accompanied by an explanation that will help guide high-quality practice for everyone in the organisation (see Example: practice principles).

You can also include a general explanation of what 'practice principles' are and how they work (the information above may help).

Everyone in your organisation needs to understand and uphold these principles. So, use language that staff can connect with and express them in a way that reflects your organisation's values.

Your principles might focus on:

- aims of practice, such as keeping people safe (including cultural safety)
- features of good practice, such as being led by the values and preferences of service users or forming truly collaborative partnerships with service users
- what kind of practices will be adopted, such as those that have been shown to be most effective based on the 'best available' evidence
- crucial shared mindsets (i.e. ways of thinking) such as beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes.

Each principle should:

- offer everyone in your organisation high-level guidance that helps them in their daily actions and decisions that relate to or impact practice
- be relevant to all your programs and services
- offer practitioners useful guidance for in-the-moment decisions and actions
- capture the ways that service users want to be treated and supported
- resonate with the passion and commitment of staff, inspiring everyone to work together to drive high-quality practice.   How to develop this component

Steps

1. **Think about what your organisation's overall vision, values, and goals** say about what high-quality practice looks like.

2. **Reflect on any core practice principles adopted by your program(s):**
   - What do these tell you about what high-quality practice looks like?
   - What common themes can you bring into a set of shared practice principles?

3. **Decide how you want your organisation's core beliefs to guide practice.** Make sure any beliefs (e.g. person-led, culturally safe and responsive, strengths-based) are reflected in your principles.

4. **Ask relevant stakeholders,** such as service users and staff, what high-quality practice looks like to them. You can use some of the sample questions in the following box to get started.

5. **Write an initial list of principles.** Avoid using vague or overused words that sound impressive but lack meaning. Instead, write the principles in a way that guides everyone in their everyday actions and decisions, including practitioners.

6. **Test and adjust these principles** if needed by getting input from relevant stakeholders.

7. **Add the final principles in your framework.**

Sample questions to explore with stakeholders

For those in your organisation

- What does high-quality practice look like?
- What practices contribute the most to positive outcomes for service users?
- How do the service users we work with want us to approach their care or support?
- What is common in how we work and practice across our programs and activities?

Service users

- How do you feel when you interact with people in our service? What works well? What could be better?
- How would you like our service to talk and interact with you?
- How do you want our service to approach your care and support?
- Can you pick some words that describe how you want to feel when you come to our service?

Communities

- What is the most important thing our service should do when talking and connecting with people/with your community?
- Can you pick some words to describe how people should feel when they connect with our service?

Partner and funding organisations

- What are our organisation's biggest strengths in working with service users and communities?
- What are some 'good practices' you've seen from our organisation?
- How could we improve our practice?
- What does 'high-quality practice' look like in what we do?

Other considerations

- Your organisation is likely already working to understand what stakeholders (e.g. services users, communities) truly want from your service. Use any valuable insights to shape and strengthen your principles (e.g. feedback mechanisms, surveys, consultations).
- If your organisation already has shared practice principles (e.g. in an organisation-wide practice framework), including these in your practice governance framework helps put them into action within your programs and services.
- If your organisation has an overall 'theory of change,'[15] think about what practice is needed 'on the ground' to make it happen; this can help shape your practice principles.

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[15] A theory of change is a detailed plan outlining the steps needed to achieve intended outcomes and the related mechanisms that will create change. It outlines the outcomes being sought and the predicted 'pathways of change' leading from a program's activities to its intended outcomes for service users.

Extra tips for adjusting to fit your organisation

- **If your organisation has a small number of people** (or even just one) available to lead developing its practice principles, think about what features of your organisation you can harness. For example, you might be a smaller organisation with strengths like fast, direct lines of communication and close staff connections due to factors like minimal organisational layers; these could be harnessed to help reach your shared principles more quickly and easily.

- **If your organisation has multiple program** streams (e.g. child and family services, aged care, disability), services, and departments, then it will be helpful to plan how, and to what degree, to involve different stakeholders. Forming a dedicated group or using an existing team focused on practice and quality can help. Although reaching shared practice principles will take time and effort, it will be worth it by providing a common language, shared 'way of working,' stronger cross-organisation connections, and a focus for improving.

6. Levers of practice quality

Levers of practice quality are tools and processes that your organisation can use to achieve high-quality practice.[16] They provide ways to improve practice quality and keep driving positive changes.

By identifying and focusing on levers of practice quality, your organisation makes the best use of its resources and strengths, while discovering new opportunities to grow and improve. Your leaders can use these levers to strengthen and support their practice improvement efforts.

Examples of potential levers are listed below:

- **Client voice:** Gather and use the views of service users to guide actions and decisions that improve practice quality[16] (e.g. compliments and complaints systems, surveys, consultations, testimonials).

- **Community voice:** Build real connections with communities so their views are heard and can drive practice improvement (e.g. to understand needs, address challenges, and explore new opportunities; to shape and guide your organisation's approach to practice governance).

- **Strategic partnerships:** Work with other organisations or agencies to keep improving (e.g. sharing resources for workforce development, running joint projects like mentoring).[17] Partners can include similar organisations, universities, and funders.

- **Staff learning and development efforts:** Help staff to keep growing their knowledge and skills (e.g. via coaching, learning and development plans, practice supervision, learning activities).

- **Staff voice:** Use methods (e.g. surveys, consultations) to gather staff feedback that will help shape efforts for improving organisational culture and practice (e.g. efforts that aim to support staff wellbeing, staff learning, and quality improvement).

- **Staff wellbeing:** Monitor and support staff wellbeing to help them do their best work and improve practice. Use your organisation's systems and policies to support staff to focus on self-care, cope with the challenges the work can present, and keep a healthy work-life balance.

- **Shared mindsets:** Communicate and actively encourage ways of thinking (e.g. beliefs, perceptions, attitudes) that fit with and support your organisation's goals for its practice (e.g. a mindset of seeing service users as having the potential to build and strengthen their skills).

- **Team structures:** Bring people together to share ideas and learnings that will improve practice and spark innovation (e.g. improvement groups, multidisciplinary teams, communities of practice).

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[16] Life Without Barriers (2023)

[17] Kwedza (2016); Martinov-Bennie, Gilchrist, & Tweedie (2022); Phillips et al. (2010)

- **Developing current and future leaders:** Maintain skilled staff at every organisational level by investing in emerging leaders and 'practice champions'[18] (i.e. succession planning). Offer learning opportunities (e.g. training, mentoring, coaching) that will develop leaders who reflect your organisation's values, vision, practice principles, shared mindsets, and desired culture.

- **Recruitment and selection processes:** Recruit staff who have the skills, mindset, and commitment to fulfill your organisation's vision for practice (e.g. make sure position descriptions, selection criteria, and interview questions fit the organisation's approach to practice).

- **Performance processes:** Performance development and management processes can be used to help staff find ways to grow in their practice. These processes give staff the support they need to build skills and knowledge to meet the organisation's goals. Fair, respectful, and clear steps are in place to handle any performance issues that might affect safe service delivery.

- **Managing change:** Careful planning and supports are provided when staff need to change or improve how they work, helping them adjust smoothly.

- **Knowledge sharing:** Regularly gather, organise, and share practice-related knowledge to support ongoing learning and improvement.

- **Distributing resources:** Make sure everyone has the time and resources they need to carry out their practice governance roles and responsibilities, alongside their other responsibilities related to maintaining high-quality practice.

- **Technology:** Use information and communication technologies to improve service delivery and practice governance (e.g. tools for collecting, analysing and reporting data).

- **Data systems:** Use information and data to keep track of practice quality and outcomes for service users. Use this data to guide decisions about practice improvement.

- **Codes of ethics:** Integrate relevant codes of ethics (e.g. codes of relevant professions) into ways of working to uphold and develop high-quality practice.

- **Quality processes:** Use quality processes and tools (e.g. audits, indicators) to track practice quality and identify areas for improvement.

- **Risk management processes:** Use risk management tools and processes to detect and manage possible threats to high-quality practice before they happen (not just after they happen).

- **Regulation, contracts and funding agreements:** Use monitoring and reporting about contracts, funding agreements, and regulations to learn about practice. These are creatively leveraged to go beyond just meeting requirements, to boosting ongoing improvement.

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[18] A practice champion is someone who actively supports, advocates for, and leads the use of 'best practices' in an organisation. They drive change and improvement through their informal influence on others, leading by example, and mentoring and helping peers to use the approaches (Morena, Gaias, & Larkin, 2022).

How the components connect

- Your **levers of practice quality** provide your organisation with concrete, practical ways to help achieve the **leadership and culture** and **vision for practice** it is aiming for

- Your **levers of practice quality** also help your organisation to achieve what it has defined as 'high-quality practice' (i.e. its **practice principles**)

- Being clear on which levers of practice quality your organisation will prioritise will help you identify and allocate **roles and responsibilities** (Chapter 7)

What to include

This component outlines the main levers your organisation has chosen to focus on. Each lever should include a brief description that explains how it will help improve practice quality (see Example: levers of practice quality).

You will need to prioritise the levers you want to focus on based on your organisation's situation, strengths, opportunities, and needs.

You might decide to include some levers that are not in place yet, but that your organisation plans to develop as part of its ongoing commitment to improving practice.

How to develop this component

Steps

1. **Develop a list of potential levers of practice quality.** The list provided earlier may be a good starting point, including for any discussions you may have with others. Also consider other levers your organisation already uses, or could use, to support and improve practice.

2. **Choose which levers on your list to include in your framework.** Use the questions below to choose and prioritise the levers. It is important to keep the list manageable.

   - What levers do we already have in place? Which of these are effectively driving practice improvement?

   - Which levers hold the most potential for improving our practice in a cost-effective and efficient way? (i.e. 'biggest bang for our buck')

   - Which levers are likely to positively affect other levers if we focus on them first?

3. **For each lever you choose, write a few sentences explaining what it means, what it involves, and most importantly, how it will help improve practice.**

4. **If possible, seek feedback from relevant stakeholders.** Consulting with staff who develop, manage or use levers can help you to refine what you have developed so far. This can also help deepen your understanding of how these levers could drive high-quality practice.

5. **Include the final list of levers and their explanations in your framework.** You may also decide to include a brief explanation of what a 'lever of practice quality' is (you could use the definition in this guide).

Extra tips for adjusting to your organisation

- Many of the levers above will already be vital parts of your organisation's daily operations. Think about how you can use these to improve practice (e.g. how can recruitment and selection processes reflect your vision for practice and practice principles). This will help you choose levers that are practical and achievable for your organisation's size, complexity, and resources.

- To make the best use of limited time and resources, it's helpful to choose levers that fit well with what your organisation is focusing on (e.g. in its strategy, activities, projects). For example, are there any levers that are particularly relevant or timely.

7. Roles and responsibilities

The 'Roles and responsibilities' component of your framework explains how each person in your organisation helps to support and improve the quality of practice.

The importance of high-quality practice to achieving good outcomes for service users justifies the attention and efforts of your whole organisation. This means recognising that individual practitioners are not the only ones responsible for high-quality practice; it should also be a top priority for your organisation's board, leaders, and other staff who support practitioners.

To coordinate practice improvement efforts across your organisation, everyone needs clear roles and responsibilities.

Defining and communicating roles in practice governance:

- establishes accountability by ensuring everyone understands what they are responsible for and what is expected of them[19]

- clarifies who is responsible for what, which helps to focus efforts, reduce duplication, and maximise the use of time and resources

- supports everyone to deliver high-quality work and care and to keep improving, leading to better results for service users and communities[20]

- creates a supportive environment where those responsible for specific tasks have the authority needed to act—this can foster harmony and teamwork among everyone involved

- helps your organisation's leaders understand how to support people in their roles, making sure they have the time and resources they need[20]

- inspires everyone in their daily work by showing them how they can improve the quality of practice and service delivery

- expect a transition period where everyone becomes familiar with their roles and responsibilities— tailoring your communications to people in different roles can help bring clarity and understanding.

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[19] Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (2019b)

[20] Life Without Barriers (2023)

What to include

This component of your framework needs to describe how everyone in your organisation contributes to the delivery of high-quality practice.

In smaller organisations, some individuals may be required to fulfil more than one role (e.g. an executive manager may also take on a 'practice leader' role). Larger organisations may bring specific staff together into groups and define the roles these groups will play in practice governance.

The types of roles people across an organisation can play in practice governance are summarised in Table 1 and then described more fully in the following sections.

Table 1. Roles in practice governance

ORGANISATIONAL ROLES	ROLES IN PRACTICE GOVERNANCE
Service users (i.e. Clients/consumers, community members)	• Receive, partner with, and benefit from services • Help to design and improve services
Practitioners	• Deliver practice in accordance with your organisation's vision for practice and practice principles, as well as the program's plan to continuously improve practice • Actively participate in activities designed to improve practice
Team leaders (i.e. frontline managers)	• Embrace and foster the 'leadership and culture' conditions • Coach[21] and support practitioners • Lead efforts to improve practice and programs • Help team members develop their skills in 'how to' monitor and improve practice
Practice leaders (e.g. dedicated practice leadership positions, 'practice champions')	• Lead efforts to improve practice in line with the 'leadership and culture' conditions • Support team leaders to develop the team's skills and confidence • Develop/improve practice governance activities and processes
Support staff (e.g. human resources, finance, quality, communications, information technology)	• Ensure practitioners have the tools, resources and support they need to deliver high-quality practice and participate in continuous practice improvement.

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[21] Coaching is an adult learning strategy where a coach (e.g. frontline manager) builds the capacity of a coachee (e.g. practitioner) by helping them to develop new skills, strengthen their existing abilities, and gain a deeper understanding of their practice (Rush & Sheldon, 2005).

Executive (e.g. CEO, Directors)	• Play a key role in fostering the desired leadership and cultural conditions so high-quality practice can be achieved • Lead and resource the design and implementation of the practice governance framework and system
Board	• Make sure that high-quality practice is central to how the organisation is run and that improvement systems are effective • Oversee practice to ensure it aligns with the organisation's purpose, values, and strategy

Where relevant below, some roles and responsibilities related to a practice governance system are given, but these will be most helpful when you are ready to extend your journey into designing that system. When the time is right, you can refer to Chapter 9 to start thinking about your system.

A **practice governance** system is a coordinated set of actions, activities or processes that need to be implemented by an organisation to carry out effective practice governance. It includes creating a 'line of sight' between practice and the outcomes achieved for service users.

Service users

Service users have an important stake in the quality of practice and are well-placed to help design services and programs. They can take on roles both 'in' and 'on' practice governance.

In practice governance, service users can:

- help your organisation understand community needs and create programs that people find engaging and useful

- provide input and feedback to improve practice; this can happen in formal ways (like surveys, advisory groups, or meetings with leaders) and informal ways (like conversations).

On practice governance, service users can:

- provide input that informs the design and implementation your approach to practice governance.

- take part in processes that help your organisation find and develop ways to improve practice (for example by participating in the design of improvement initiatives).

Practitioners

Practitioners use their skills and knowledge to bring your organisation's vision for practice and practice principles to life in their interactions with service users.

Your practice governance framework guides how practitioners will be supported in their work and how their ideas will be included in your organisation's ongoing improvement efforts. This approach ensures those working directly with service users can drive change with their insights and ideas.

The role of practitioners is to:

- deliver high-quality practice based on your organisation's practice guidelines (e.g. practice frameworks and models, practice principles).

- keep their practice skills up to date.

- take responsibility for improving and learning in their work.

- share ideas and insights from working directly with service users to improve practice.

- contribute to team efforts to make practice, service delivery, and organisational culture better.

- take part in and develop skills for ongoing improvement activities.

- help design and develop your practice governance system and actively support it.

- collect essential data and information about practice.

- openly and quickly communicate improvement-related successes, risks, and opportunities.

- support service users in sharing their feedback to drive meaningful changes.

- uphold your organisation's values in their work with service users and in constantly improving practices.

Team leaders

Team leaders (i.e. frontline managers) help achieve better outcomes for service users by building their teams' skills and confidence in practice. Practice governance helps team leaders focus on delivering high-quality care by emphasising their role in supporting and improving practice.

The role of team leaders is to:

- nurture a team environment focused on learning, growth, and wellbeing

- support the team to implement the program's practices effectively

- advocate for and prioritise time and resources for practice governance roles and activities

- coach team members

- help the team to work together to solve problems and share ideas

- identify and support 'practice champions' who provide valuable peer support within the team and help build strong peer support systems

- encourage feedback from service users and then use it to improve practice

- help the team to collect and use data to enhance the work

- lead team efforts to improve practice.

Practice leaders

Practice leaders are usually experienced staff who help support and develop how the work is done. Practice leadership can take different forms in different organisations. For example, it can be a specific position (e.g. a 'practice lead'), exist informally (e.g. a 'practice champion), or be part of another role. It can be set up formally or emerge naturally within an organisation.

Your framework can demonstrate that your organisation truly values practice leadership and can help authorise the role that practice leaders play in improving practice quality.

Since responsibility for quality practice belongs to line managers (from team leaders to the executive), practice leaders can support them to build their team's skills and confidence. A practice governance framework explains how this support role works.

The role of practice leaders is to:

- help team leaders provide high-quality support to practitioners (e.g. coaching)
- drive transformation and improvement in practice by leading by example and helping others to build their skills
- find and use evidence to help design practices and programs
- support the selection and/or design of practice frameworks and models
- support the development of data collection and reporting systems to improve practice
- help create, monitor, and improve the practice governance system.

Support staff

Support staff in corporate and administrative roles (such as human resources, finance, quality, communications and information technology) play key roles in practice governance by designing and/or managing systems, policies, and processes that make high-quality work possible. Those skilled in organisational processes, such as planning and improvement cycles, can also play an important part in improving practice quality.

The role of support staff is to:

- understand your organisation's approach to practice,[22] so this 'shared way of working' shapes:
    - how your organisation operates, such as developing position descriptions to recruit skilled staff
    - how your organisation delivers its services day-to-day, such as greeting and welcoming service users
- help design, manage, and maintain tools and processes (i.e. levers of practice quality) that support and improve practice quality
- support practitioners to collect and report data on practice quality and outcomes
- help ensure your organisation meets its requirements related to practice quality (e.g. reporting, legal)
- identify and support the use of technology and tools that support and improve practice
- manage internal and external communications about practice
- provide administrative and project support for practice improvement initiatives
- create policies, processes, and procedures that support your practice governance system.

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[22] For example, your vision for practice and practice principles.

Executive

The executive, led by the CEO, manages the daily operations of your organisation. While the board creates your organisation's strategy, it empowers the executive by giving it the authority to work towards this strategy and your organisation's mission.

The executive is accountable to the board for your organisation's performance and results, including its quality of practice and the outcomes achieved for service users.

The role of the executive is to:

- build and support a culture that promotes ongoing learning, growth, and staff wellbeing
- make sure that your organisation has defined what 'high-quality practice' looks like in the context of its programs and services (i.e. its practice principles)
- lead efforts to improve practice quality across your organisation
- make sure effective systems are in place to continuously improve practice quality
- develop your practice governance framework
- oversee the development and best use of 'levers of practice quality' (see Chapter 6)
- ensure key stakeholders are involved in the design and operation of the practice governance framework and system as needed
- provide the necessary resources for staff development, learning, reflection, and work improvement
- build staff skills and confidence to engage in practice improvement
- provide the board with clear, useful practice-related information to help them in their oversight role (e.g. data on the quality of practice and outcomes achieved by programs)
- develop the practice governance system needed to implement your framework (when your organisation is ready for this next step on the journey).

Board

The board is responsible for your organisation's governance. It sets your organisation's purpose, values, and strategy. They also monitor progress and impact, ensuring your organisation remains viable and sustainable.

Practice governance works like other areas of organisational governance. Boards need to set up governance systems that help them fulfil this responsibility, just as they do for strategy, risk, finance, safeguarding, and legal matters.

The board must oversee your organisation's practice, ensuring it aligns with your organisational purpose and values and that processes are in place to drive improvement. The board delegates the task of defining and developing high-quality practice to the executive team, who can draw on the technical skills of their staff as needed.

Since quality practice is essential for your organisation to achieve its goals, boards should also think about how decisions in every area of governance impact your organisation's ability to deliver high-quality practice. Integrating practice governance into the board's responsibilities means ensuring all decisions, such as financial or risk related decisions, are made with practice quality in mind.

Given the above, the role of the board in practice governance is to:

- make sure high-quality practice is central to your organisation's overall vision and strategy

- engage and support executive level leaders with the skills to ensure high-quality practice
- oversee your organisation's approach to practice governance
- work with the leadership team to support and encourage ongoing practice improvement
- accept a reasonable level of risk to allow for experimentation, innovation, and learning
- identify and manage practice-related risks
- balance cost and quality when making decisions about service delivery
- support, monitor and evaluate practice improvement efforts
- balance the interests of all stakeholders in relation to practice improvement, including service users, staff, and the community.[23]

Subcommittees

The entire board is responsible for practice governance. The board cannot assign responsibility for practice quality to a subcommittee. It is also important that subcommittees do not take on operational roles that belong to the executive, such as defining what high-quality practice looks like.

However, if your organisational resources allow and it is deemed necessary due to the volume of work, then a subcommittee like a practice governance committee may support the board by:

- monitoring, investigating, reporting, and giving advice to the board on practice governance
- gathering and sharing information on practice quality and improvement
- helping the executive to develop your organisation's approach to practice governance
- helping to share information with service users, communities, staff, and partners to improve practice
- helping the board to monitor and review its role and processes in practice governance
- monitoring and reporting on how well your practice governance system is working.

How to develop this component

Since organisations vary in size, complexity, staff positions, and resources, you will need to adjust roles and responsibilities to match how your organisation operates. The goal is to show how everyone helps improve the quality of practice.

Steps

1. **Identify the people or groups** (in larger organisations) that your framework should include.

2. **Create an outline of roles and responsibilities for each person or group** that is tailored to your organisation. You can use the information above to help you get started. Think about how the roles work together and support each other, such as how the executive supports the board's work.

3. **Ask relevant stakeholders** (e.g. representatives of the different groups, other staff) for their feedback on the draft as needed. Then adjust if needed.

4. **Include the final roles and responsibilities** in your framework.

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[23] Mannion, Freeman, Millar, & Davies (2016)

Extra tips for adjusting to your organisation

- In some organisations, especially those **smaller in size,** some people may fulfil the responsibilities of more than one type of role; this is normal and can be beneficial. For example, in a small organisation an executive might have a caseload (i.e. fulfil the 'practitioner' role) and be a 'practice champion' (i.e. fulfil the 'practice leadership' role).

- If your organisation is **increasing in size** and/or experiencing frequent staff changes, use this component of your framework as an opportunity to identify who is best suited to fulfil particular responsibilities, what support these people will need, and help everyone understand their role in driving high-quality practice.

8. Bringing your framework together

There is no right and wrong way to document and communicate your practice governance framework. It's important to choose an approach works for your organisation. However, here is an outline that you can use and adapt to help you get started.

One approach is to organise your document around the five key components of a practice governance framework with a section on each (i.e. Leadership and culture, Vision for practice, Practice principles, etc.). Then add an introduction that provides your audience with the context and background to your journey into practice governance.

A glossary at the end of your document can be helpful since the terminology in practice governance may be new to readers.

Introductory section

Your introductory section should give an overview of practice governance, express your associated 'whole-of-organisation' commitment, and inspire and empower action. It should also introduce the main components that make up your organisation's practice governance framework.

You may consider using the sub-sections in Table 2 in your introduction. Suggested content is provided for each sub-section, as well as key chapters of this guide to support your writing.

Table 2. Example structure for an introductory section of a practice governance framework

SUB SECTION	SUGGESTED CONTENT	KEY CHAPTERS
Message from leadership	This message can be from an individual or group. Leaders who may give this message include the board chair and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The message could include a brief sentence or two about each of these areas: • your organisation's vision and mission, including how your framework will support these • what practice governance is	1. Practice governance: an overview Background Appendix D: Glossary

	• the purpose of a practice governance approach and why it's important	
	• your organisation's practice governance journey so far and where it's going next	
	• your organisation's goals and aims for its practice governance approach	
	• acknowledgement of contributors	
	• an inspiring and motivating 'call to action' for everyone in your organisation (this may make a clear link between the framework, practice, and better outcomes).	
About the organisation	Key contextual information about your organisation that that you wish to emphasise to the framework's audience, with a focus on how this information aligns with the framework and comes together to drive high-quality practice. For example, your organisation's: • vision • values • purpose • mission • who your organisation supports (e.g. who are its service users).	
The organisation's practice governance journey	An outline of your organisation's practice governance journey thus far. The aspects included will vary depending on where your organisation is at, but may include brief information about: • your framework's development and/or revision of an existing one • next steps (e.g. installation; implementation; plans for ongoing reviews and updates).	1. Practice governance: an overview
The purpose of the framework	A summary of why your organisation needs a practice governance framework and why it is relevant to everyone in your organisation. This can include the benefits, advantages, and opportunities for service users, your organisation, and other key stakeholders. Additional aspects that may be included if desired: • key contextual information about the operating landscape (e.g. findings of Royal	1. Practice governance: an overview, particularly benefits of practice governance Background

	Commissions; policies; funder requirements; standards) • fit and relevance to your strategic plan.	
Fit with other organisational processes and systems	A brief explanation of how a practice governance approach and framework interfaces with other key aspects of your organisation's approach, documentation, or practice initiatives. Some examples to consider include: • how your practice governance approach and framework relate to other key organisational documents and initiatives (e.g. strategic plan; organisational vision, mission, purpose, and values) • how your practice governance framework aligns with program-level practice frameworks and models • how practice governance is distinct from, but integrates with, other forms of governance (e.g. finance, risk)—if relevant and needed, this may include the difference between practice governance and clinical governance. It can be helpful to enhance your audience's understanding by including visuals that illustrate the key relationships, layers, and/or hierarchies between the various parts being explained (e.g. figures, diagrams).	1. Practice governance: An overview, particularly The role of a practice governance framework
Components of the framework	A brief explanation that your practice governance framework is made up of x core components (where x is the number of components in your framework). Then list what these components are (e.g. leadership and culture, vision for practice, etc).	

Glossary section

It is recommended that you include a Glossary as the final section of your practice governance framework. Here, you can include key definitions to help you build a 'shared language' and understanding with your intended audience (as well as within your organisation more broadly).

At a minimum, you should include definitions of:

- practice
- practice governance
- practice governance framework
- the term your organisation uses to refer to the people it partners with (e.g. service users, clients, consumers, stakeholders, people).

You can use the Glossary in this guide to help you with your definitions.

9. Introduction to developing a practice governance system

Once you have developed your practice governance framework, your next step will be establishing the right processes to bring it to life.

A detailed discussion about how to design and implement these processes is beyond the scope of this guide. But this chapter provides a brief introduction to developing a practice governance system to help you make a start once you're ready.

About a practice governance system

A **practice governance system** is a coordinated set of actions, activities or processes that need to be implemented by an organisation to carry out effective practice governance. It includes creating a 'line of sight' between practice and the outcomes achieved for service users.

A practice governance system bridges the gap between your practice governance framework and its implementation. It identifies the necessary tools and processes required to bring the aspirations and principles set out in your framework to life.

A practice governance framework is your organisation's blueprint for practice governance, while the practice governance system is how your organisation will put this blueprint into action.

Instead of seeing your system as just extra paperwork, you can think of it as the main way your organisation stays focused on achieving good outcomes for service users. By focusing on results, your system can also help you meet the growing demand from funders to report on outcomes. A well-designed system can also make tasks easier and faster for your organisation and help it to meet its obligations, like reporting for contracts.

Developing your system

The degree to which you break down and organise the tasks, activities, and processes involved in practice governance depends on the size and complexity of your organisation. The more programs and staff you have, the more you need to plan for achieving consistency across your organisation.

Smaller organisations will benefit from simple and efficient processes because there are fewer staff involved to manage. Informal (but intentional) processes may be enough when there are less organisational layers between your leaders and service users.

Ready-made systems that fit all organisations don't exist. You need to design your system to suit your organisation's needs to make it practical and useful.

You don't need to start with a 'perfect' practice governance system. You can develop and improve it over time as your organisation grows and changes. This has the added benefit of letting you try out and refine new parts of your system (e.g. with one program) before rolling out changes across your whole organisation.

How you develop your practice governance system will depend on where your organisation is at on its practice governance journey and the time and resources you have.

If you're just starting out, you can map out your system using your practice governance framework as the starting point and then build it in phases as time and resources allow.

If your organisation already has a system in place, you can adopt an 'improvement approach' and still drawn on the ideas in this chapter to help.

Good information is essential

Effective practice governance needs good information. You need information on how well your practice follows your planned approach (i.e. practice fidelity[24]) and whether it is delivering outcomes for service users.

Knowing what you are doing and what results you are getting is key if you want to focus on improvement. Just looking at outcomes won't tell you about the quality of your practice or where you need to make changes. You also need to compare this information over time to see if your efforts to improve are working.

Both numbers (quantitative data) and stories (qualitative data) are valuable. Measures of practice fidelity and effectiveness help you make decisions about where to focus improvements based on data.

The type of data you collect will depend on your time, resources, skills, and existing data collection tools. Start with what you have and work to improve your data over time. For example, informal client stories and feedback can provide new insights into how to improve practice, but you may decide to extend this using an evidence-based questionnaire that research has shown to be a valid and reliable measure of an outcome you care about.

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[24] Practice fidelity is the degree to which a specific practice has been carried out the way it was originally designed and intended.

Elements of a practice governance system

There are three elements of a practice governance system to consider as you build it:

- connecting practice and outcomes

- using extra sources of practice information

- connections with other organisational systems

These elements are explained in the sections that follow.

1. Connecting practice and outcomes

Practice governance is about supporting and improving the interaction between practitioners and service users. It involves creating a 'line of sight' between what you do in your daily practice and outcomes for service users. A good system helps your organisation to understand how these two things are linked. It should also help your organisation to answer the key questions discussed in Chapter 1 and repeated in the following box.

Practice governance system: key questions

1. Do we know the outcomes we want this program to achieve?

2. Do we have a plan for how the program will achieve the intended changes?

3. Are we carrying out our plan effectively?

4. Are our service users actively engaged in the change process?

5. Do we see the early changes that show we are on track to reach the intended outcomes?

6. Are we achieving the outcomes we are aiming for?

7. How accurate and trustworthy is our information, and how can we make it better?

8. What has worked well, and how do we know it reflects high-quality practice?

9. Where can we improve?

10. How will we know if we are improving?

11. What actions are we taking to make improvements?

12. What have we learned from our improvement efforts so far??

It is at the program level that your organisation needs to define the outcomes it is aiming for, and the activities needed to reach those results. This is why an important part of your system will involve the design and performance of your programs. You need to align the way your programs work with your organisation's goals and vision for practice, and then create a feedback loop that helps your organisation to understand and improve its impact (see Figure 4).

Some key parts you may include in your system that are related to program design, program performance, and program improvement are described below. You can also find a diagram of a comprehensive system that links practice with service user outcomes in Appendix C.

Figure 4. Functions of a practice governance system

Program design

This part of your system is about making sure that everyone understands the outcomes that a particular program is seeking to achieve and how it plans to achieve those outcomes.

Each program in your organisation should have:

- clearly defined outcomes and a plan for measuring those outcomes

- a plan for how the program will create the changes needed to achieve the outcomes it is aiming for. This plan might be called a 'theory of change' or a 'program logic.' This helps you answer **Question 1: Do we know the outcomes we want this program to achieve?** from the box above

- a description of the key activities and actions that are essential for making the above 'change plan' work, showing how these align with your organisation's overall vision and principles of practice. Programs often design or adopt a program-level practice model or framework to provide a detailed description of what effective practice looks like within that program. This answers **Question 2: Do we have a plan for how the program will achieve the intended changes?**

Program performance

This part of your system is about creating a way to collect feedback about your program, which is key to making ongoing improvements to its effectiveness.

Every program in your organisation should regularly measure and monitor how well it:

- follows its intended practices, otherwise known as practice fidelity (answers **Question 3: Are we carrying out our plan effectively?**)

- engages clients (answers **Question 4: Are our service users actively engaged in the change process?**)

- creates change (answers **Question 5: Do we see the early changes that show we are on track to reach the intended outcomes?**)
- achieves its intended results (answers **Question 6: Are we achieving the outcomes we are aiming for?**).

Each program should also collect and share the above information so it can show its progress and impact over time. This allows you to detect or measure improvements.

Improvement processes

This part of your system is about creating processes that will drive improvement using the information discussed above. Ideally, the processes you build will draw on the expertise of everyone in your organisation to help find areas for improvement, develop solutions, and assess how well they work.

This might include:

- using step-by-step improvement processes, like Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles[25], to find areas for improvement and coordinate systematic improvement efforts
- setting up ways to share what is learned across your organisation
- creating reporting and decision-making processes that create transparency about improvement efforts and learnings.

7. Using extra sources of practice information

As we discussed above, one of the core parts of your system is about collecting information on practice quality for each program based on its intended activities and outcomes. But there are other valuable sources of practice information that can add to this and help improve quality over time.

Some extra options to consider when developing your system are provided below. You should also think about what other valuable sources of practice information and insights you already have access to, so you can harness these as you develop and build your system.

Service user feedback

Feedback from service users is essential for improving practice. Your organisation can gather and use this feedback in many ways. Some options include:

- client satisfaction surveys
- client advisory or reference groups
- ways to give compliments and make complaints
- methods for capturing and reporting informal feedback
- including service users and community members in committees, working groups, and panels.

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[25] An evidence-based method for rapidly testing a change by planning it (Plan), trying it (Do), observing the results (Study), and acting on what is learned (Act). After a change is tested, the cycles can be used to spread or implement change.

Quality assurance

When your organisation must follow or meet external quality standards, audits, and compliance checks, this can also provide useful information about practice. Your system should make sure that any key findings or results from these are harnessed to drive improvements in practice.

Risks and incidents

Your system should help your organisation capture, analyse, and learn from incidents, risks, and near misses. Your organisation should treat everyone involved fairly as it investigates (in line with a 'just culture' outlined in Chapter 3). It should also use these events as valuable opportunities to learn, grow, and find ways of better supporting day-to-day work.

Auditing

A challenge for organisations who provide social services is there are few tangible outputs from practice that can be checked for quality.

One example of a tangible output that practitioners do produce that can reflect the underlying practice are case notes. Random case file auditing can help you track whether a program is being delivered as planned and in a way that reflects the desired practice. It can also highlight any challenges in implementing programs effectively.

8. Connections with other organisational systems

Your practice governance system should connect and work well with other processes and systems in your organisation.

When developing your system, think about any changes you may need to make to improve how all these processes and systems will work together and share information. Building these connections will also ensure that practice quality is 'front of mind' in all major decisions. Here are some examples:

Strategic planning

Boards and executive teams should make practice a key part of your organisation's strategy. Key questions to ask include: 'What does the best-available evidence say is the best way to approach our work and practice?' and 'What do we need to do to effectively support this practice?'. You can also use information about practice quality to measure your organisation's progress and development.

Risk and safety

You may need to review your risk management and safeguarding systems to align them with your practice governance approach and framework. Practice-related risks could be regularly assessed along with other organisational risks. You could also set up processes that will help you identify how practice improvement plans can reduce these risks, and then ensure that any priorities will lead to real changes in practice.

Financial management

Supporting high-quality practice and practice governance requires resources. Your organisation's leaders should decide where to invest in improving practice and how to sustain these efforts over time. They should also plan how to measure the 'return' on these investments (e.g. tracking improvements in practice). Your budgeting and reporting formats can be updated to provide clear information about investments in quality practice.

Knowledge management

Finding, using, and sharing knowledge is essential for supporting and developing practice. Effective information systems help practitioners work more efficiently by making important information easy to access. You may need to improve or create new knowledge management processes to better support practice.

Advocacy

Your practice governance system focuses on improving practice quality. But the information you gather can also be useful to policymakers and other stakeholders (e.g. if it casts light on community needs or shows how a local innovation has improved impact). Consider how you can use this information to support your advocacy efforts.

Accountability

A practice governance system can improve contract reporting, especially in measuring outcomes. This will help your organisation meet the expectations from funders to report on outcomes for service users, as well as outputs (like the number of service users who received support). As an organisation who receives public funding, this can help you remain accountable by reporting outcomes to the broader community.

Workforce

The connection between practice governance and your human resources (HR) systems is particularly important. As your practice governance approach develops, you may need to update position descriptions, so they also reflect 'roles and responsibilities' in practice governance. You may also want to review how you attract and recruit talent to bring in people who have the passion and skills essential for driving a continuous improvement culture.

Monitoring and enhancing your system

Your system will need regular, ongoing attention and updates; it's not something you can 'set and forget.'

To make sure your system continues to work well, grow, and adapt to change, consider the following:

- **Assign 'system owners':** Choose and authorise people or groups to manage, monitor, and improve your system.

- **Define and check your outputs:** Clearly describe what your system should produce and make sure these outputs are included in regular tasks and decisions (e.g. reports for the board and/or a practice governance committee).

- **Collect and review data about how the system is working:** Set up Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), such as the percentage of service users who return satisfaction surveys, or the number and focus of practice improvement projects.

- **Create support documents:** Make sure that staff using the system have the necessary guidance, policies, and protocols to support them in their work.

- **Upskill staff:** Make sure staff are provided with the learning and development they need to use the system (e.g. training and coaching) and include a thorough orientation for new staff.

- **Use improvement cycles:** Apply evidence-based improvement methods (e.g. Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles) to keep enhancing your system over time. For example, to test a new change to increase the completion rates of outcomes measures.

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Appendix A: Frequently Asked Questions

Your organisation can use this FAQs resource to support stakeholder engagement, communication, and buy-in about practice governance.

What is 'practice governance'?

Practice governance is an approach your organisation can use to improve and maintain the quality of its practice, achieving better outcomes for people and communities. It does this by creating a clear 'line of sight' between what your organisation does and the outcomes it seeks to achieve for families.

Practice governance puts high-quality practice at the centre of your organisation's activities and efforts, encouraging everyone to work together to keep improving.

Practice quality is seen as everyone's business, not just practitioners, because creating real and long-lasting improvement requires the efforts of everyone, all the way up to the board.

In summary, practice governance:

- explains and shares what high-quality practice looks like
- supports you to deliver high-quality practice
- drives ongoing improvement in practice.

How is clinical governance different to practice governance?

Clinical governance started in the 1990s to ensure patients received safe, high-quality care in hospitals and clinics. It included a focus on checking and improving care.

Practice governance grew from this idea but is designed specifically for community-based child and family services. It provides a more tailored and meaningful approach because it:

- uses terms and ideas that fit the context and needs of child and family services, rather than clinical services

- supports the delivery and improvement of evidence-based practices more broadly, rather than being specific to clinical or medical care
- recognises that 'social' care focuses on connecting and building relationships, which means different approaches are needed for defining and tracking high-quality care

What is a 'practice governance framework'?

A practice governance framework outlines how your organisation will actively improve practice. It describes the overall approach that will be taken to support high-quality practice, including the roles and responsibilities of all involved. Think of it as your organisation's 'blueprint' for how it will achieve effective practice governance.

While the frameworks developed by social services organisations will share similar features, each framework must be tailored to its individual organisation to be relevant and impactful. The Parenting Research Centre, in partnership with ACWA and Fams, have developed a model framework that can be adapted by your organisation. This model is described in the *Practice Governance Framework: A guide for community-based child and family services*.

Our organisation is already doing great work. Why should we adopt a practice governance approach?

The social services sector is indeed doing amazing work to support children, young people and families to grow and thrive. Adopting a practice governance approach will amplify this great work by helping you:

- **Spotlight your impact:** Practice governance helps you measure and showcase your impact to others, like funders, clients, and communities.
- **Work in a cohesive and united way:** Shows everyone in your organisation the important role they will play in the organisation's practice 'improvement journey'. This helps everyone to get 'on board' with this motivating and inspiring shared purpose.
- **Move beyond compliance to elevating practice:** Supports your organisation to not only meet its compliance and contract requirements, but to go beyond by driving improvement to support better outcomes for families and communities.
- **Boost transparency and accountability:** Strengthens your organisation's openness and transparency about its actions and results in relation to practice. Practice governance also fosters a sense of shared ownership of outcomes within your organisation.
- **Be future-ready:** Helps you set up ways to gather and report data that will meet funders' growing expectations for information on client outcomes.

How will our organisation benefit from a practice governance approach?

Practice governance can offer many benefits for your organisation, including:

- **Amplify improvement:** Unifies everyone in a collective effort to deliver high-quality practice and keep improving, from your board to practitioners.
- **Ground-up transformation:** Values and harnesses the ideas, insights, and skills of your frontline workers, using this to achieve real and lasting improvements.
- **Evidence-based action:** Helps everyone in your organisation to be confident that actions and decisions are based on the 'best available' evidence and data you collect.
- **Uplift workplace culture:** Helps your leaders and staff support everyone's wellbeing and creates a space where learning, change, and flexibility are embraced.

Who will be our organisation's 'key players' in practice governance?

In your practice governance approach, everyone has a role in continuing to drive high-quality practice. It's not just for practitioners; support staff (e.g. HR, finance), leadership, clients, communities and the board all play a part in ensuring your organisation keeps improving practice.

Your practice governance framework can help everyone to understand their role in driving improvement. This can also boost motivation and excitement for the journey ahead.

How much time will our organisation need to embed practice governance?

This is a tricky question to answer because there isn't a 'one size fits all' approach. Your organisation's size, complexity, and available resources all be factors in the amount of time needed to develop and implement a practice governance framework.

There is no need to rush the process; the process of reflecting and discussing can bring your organisation the biggest insights on its practice governance journey.

It is best to start small and gradually build up your practice governance approach. You don't need to get it perfect right away; make a start and improve over time, adjusting to new changes, needs, and opportunities that arise.

Ideally, your practice governance approach becomes a natural part of how people do their work every day, not an extra burden. Design your approach so it guides day-to-day activities and efforts already happening towards achieving high-quality practice.

Will our organisation need to 'start from scratch'?

No, as your organisation has likely already done a lot of thinking relevant to practice governance. Developing a practice governance framework is the perfect opportunity to bring this thinking together and develop it further.

Your organisation can also build on the great assets it already has. This can save valuable time and prevent repeating previous efforts. Here are some examples of existing assets your organisation might use to start developing its practice governance framework:

- Key documents, such as your organisation's strategy, vision, and values

- Existing approaches to practice that are core to your organisation's 'way of working' (e.g. practice frameworks, models, or principles)

- Valuable insights you have previously gathered from stakeholders, such as clients and communities, on what they expect from your service

- Information you're already collecting about client outcomes and the implementation of your programs.

Why should my organisation invest time in practice governance?

Social service agencies already understand that nothing is more important than the quality of practice and achieving good outcomes for service users. Practice governance empowers your organisation to focus its attention and energies on the quality of its work.

A practice governance approach not only boosts your organisation's effectiveness, but it can also improve efficiency by:

- Making data collection and reporting more 'streamlined,' reducing unnecessary work, and ensuring all layers of the organisation receive the information that is most useful for driving improvements

- Putting clear and effective practice data in the hands of everyone in the organisation, so they are empowered to make decisions that will achieve better outcomes for families

- Helping everyone focus on approaches that are most effective at improving outcomes

- Streamlining day-to-day operations so all systems and activities work together to maintain and enhance high-quality practice

Our organisation is smaller. Is practice governance achievable for us?

Absolutely! While organisations of different size and complexity might face different issues and challenges, there will also be unique assets and strengths to leverage to achieve practice governance. For example, smaller organisations may have fewer people and programs to coordinate as they develop their approach. They may also have fewer layers between service users and leaders, enabling rich and timely feedback on practice quality and impact.

Your organisation is encouraged to design its practice governance approach with its available time and resources in mind. The *Practice Governance Framework: A guide for community-based child and family services* provides guidance on how to tailor practice governance to your organisation.

Practice governance framework: A guide for community-based child and family services

It's recommended you develop your approach 'step by step'. Start small, carefully thinking about how you can draw on your existing assets. Then gradually build on this over time.

You don't have to get your practice governance approach and framework 'perfect' on the first try. And your approach will need to evolve with time anyway to respond to organisational and sector changes or needs.

Our organisation already has a practice governance approach. What can this 'Guide' offer?

Think of your practice governance approach as always being a 'work in progress' (rather than 'set and forget'); it needs to be regularly monitored, reviewed, and updated to keep up with changing conditions, needs, and opportunities.

This is where the *Practice Governance Framework: A guide for community-based child and family services* comes in and can act as a resource for elevating your organisation's approach. The 'model and guide' will empower your organisation to review its current approach, consider new ideas, uncover 'gaps,' and seize opportunities to extend and transform.

Our organisation runs multiple program areas or streams (e.g. child and family services, disability, etc). Can we still benefit from a practice governance approach?

Yes. Typically, a practice governance approach is designed to be used across the whole organisation. This means it 'sits above' the level of individual program streams. Your approach can create a powerful alignment between your organisation's vision, values, purpose and strategy—and the way individual programs and services are delivered (see Figure 5):
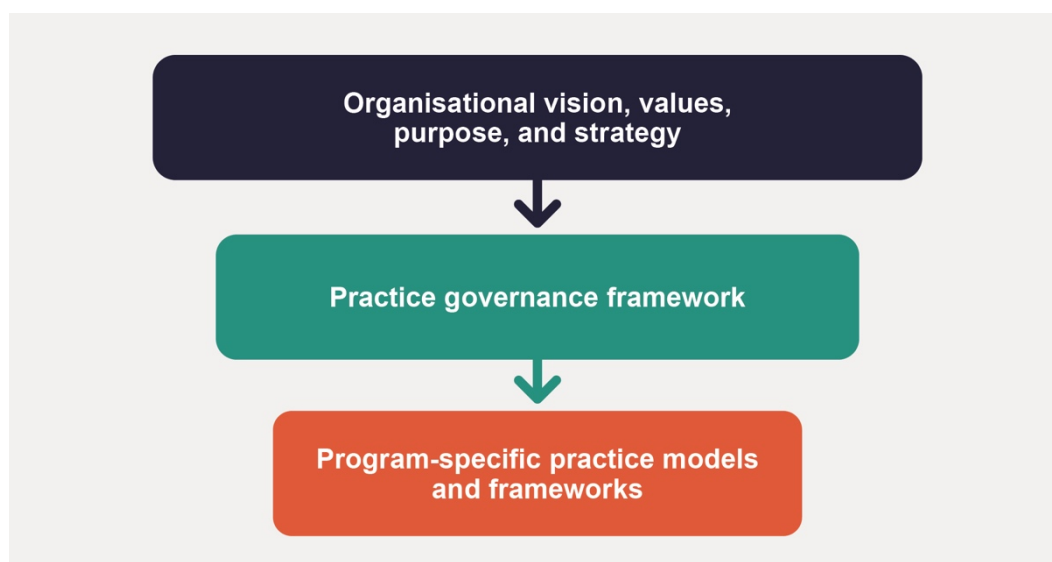

Figure 5. The position of a practice governance framework in an organisation.

If your organisation delivers multiple programs, your practice governance approach can ensure these:

- work consistently, providing everyone with a similar experience, no matter which service they encounter
- have a unified direction and approach for improving practice and outcomes
- share a common language for discussing practice quality and improvement.

How do we know if our organisation is ready to start its practice governance journey?

Some signs to look out for include:

- ongoing, evidence-driven learning and improvement is high on your organisation's agenda
- leadership, especially the board and executive, are keen to explore new ways to improve practice
- your organisation wants to do more than just meet its compliance and funding requirements and is invested in elevating practice to achieve stronger outcomes for service users and communities
- your organisation wants clearer and more meaningful ways to show your board its great work and impact of everyone's efforts.

Our organisation is ready to start its practice governance journey. How can we get started?

Some practical and useful steps to get you on the journey include:

- start conversations about practice governance with your organisation's leaders, executive, and board: aim to spark curiosity and interest to build momentum!
- familiarise yourself with the Practice Governance Framework: A guide for community-based child and family services to get ready for the journey ahead
- identify the people within and beyond your organisation who can propel your practice governance journey forward. While internal players will have a vital role, don't forget to harness the strengths of your partners and networks to boost the work
- start building your organisation's practice governance approach to 'set the stage' for a lasting impact!

Appendix B: Asset Mapping Tool

Your organisation can use this tool to identify existing assets it can use to develop each component of its practice governance approach and framework (e.g. documents, resources, tools, plans), as well as to determine what your organisation wants or needs to develop.

You don't need to have every asset in the tool; the aim is to reflect on what exists and what might still be needed.

Asset mapping tool

LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE

Pre-thinking: What key skillsets do we need to develop this component and who holds these?

ASSET (e.g. documents, resources, tools, plans)	In place	Partially in place	To be created	To be updated
Codes of conducts that articulate expectations of conduct and behaviour across the organisation (e.g. standards of behaviour)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Collective commitment statement that makes concrete how we will act and behave	☐	☐	☐	☐
Position descriptions and key selection criteria	☐	☐	☐	☐
Interview tools (e.g. proformas)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Onboarding and induction process and resources	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leadership resources (internal/external) (e.g. on desired leadership style; from training packages)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Supervision and coaching resources and tools	☐	☐	☐	☐

OUR NEXT STEPS
For example:
• Who do we need to speak to?
• Where can we locate this asset?
• How will this asset help us?

VISION FOR PRACTICE

Pre-thinking: *What key skillsets do we need to develop this component and who holds these?*

ASSET (e.g. documents, resources, tools, plans)	In place	Partially in place	To be created	To be updated
Organisation's overall vision	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organisational mission and purpose	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organisational values	☐	☐	☐	☐
Organisational strategy (e.g. strategic plan)	☐	☐	☐	
Organisation-wide practice principles (e.g. those in an organisation-wide practice framework)	☐	☐	☐	

OUR NEXT STEPS
For example:
• Who do we need to speak to?
• Where can we locate this asset?
• How will this asset help us?

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

Pre-thinking: What key skillsets do we need to develop this component and who holds these?

ASSET
(e.g. documents, resources, tools, plans)

In place

Partially in place

To be created

To be updated

OUR NEXT STEPS
For example:
• Who do we need to speak to?
• Where can we locate this asset?
• How will this asset help us?

Organisation-wide practice principles (e.g. those in an organisation-wide practice framework)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Practice principles of individual programs and services

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Organisation's overall vision

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Pre-thinking: What key skillsets do we need to develop this component and who holds these?

ASSET
(e.g. documents, resources, tools, plans)

In place

Partially in place

To be created

To be updated

OUR NEXT STEPS
For example:
• Who do we need to speak to?
• Where can we locate this asset?
• How will this asset help us?

ASSET	In place	Partially in place	To be created	To be updated
Position descriptions and key selection criteria at each layer of the organisation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Board charter	☐	☐	☐	☐
Guidelines and resources about communication and feedback with key stakeholders (e.g. service users, communities, funders)	☐	☐	☐	☐
If applicable, terms of reference for relevant committees (e.g. subcommittees)	☐	☐	☐	☐

LEVERS OF PRACTICE QUALITY

Pre-thinking: What key skillsets do we need to develop this component and who holds these?

ASSET
(e.g. documents, resources, tools, plans)

In place

Partially in place

To be created

To be updated

OUR NEXT STEPS
For example:
• Who do we need to speak to?
• Where can we locate this asset?
• How will this asset help us?

Organisational strategy (e.g. strategic plan)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Staff development and capability building strategy documents (e.g. workforce capability frameworks)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Change management documents and resources (e.g. change management approaches, plans, strategies)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

When you have your framework and are ready to develop your practice governance system:

PRACTICE GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

Pre-thinking: *What key skillsets do we need to develop this component and who holds these?*

| ASSET (e.g. documents, resources, tools, plans)	In place	Partially in place	To be created	To be updated	OUR NEXT STEPS
					For example: • Who do we need to speak to? • Where can we locate this asset? • How will this asset help us?
Data collection systems	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Quality improvement plans, tools and strategies	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Practice improvement process resources and documents (e.g. Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles)	☐	☐	☐	☐	

Appendix C: Elements of a practice governance system

A comprehensive practice governance system can help your organisation achieve an evidence-based approach to program design and delivery. This template outlines key elements of such a system.

Taking an evidence-based approach means defining program activities and actions, monitoring implementation of those activities, and measuring outcomes. A practice governance system establishes processes that collect and use this information to support program design and improvement. Figure 6 summarises the key elements of such a system and shows how it connects with a practice governance framework. An explanation of each element follows.
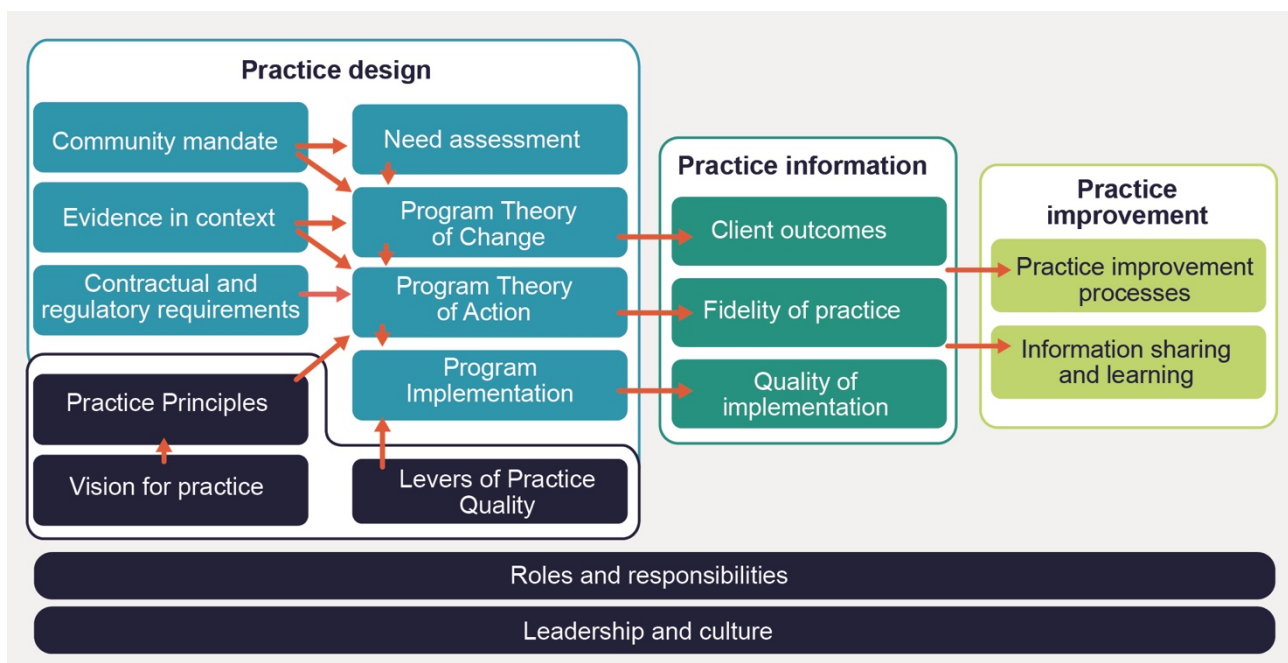
Figure 6: Elements of your practice governance system and their relationship to your programs and the components of your practice governance framework

Practice design

This part of your system is designed to ensure that each program is clear on the outcomes it is aiming for and how to achieve them. It includes a:

- **Theory of change:** A step-by-step plan that outlines the actions required to reach the intended outcomes and the mechanisms driving change.

- **Theory of action:** The specific practices that bring the theory of change to life within the program.

- **Program implementation:** The structured process of introducing and supporting new practices or interventions, with mechanisms to maintain and improve quality.

A program's **theory of change** should be informed by:

- **Needs assessment:** Understanding the needs of service users

- **Community mandate:** Building alignment with the goals, interests and expectations of the community a program operates in through authentic community engagement.

- **Evidence in context:** Combining research with local insights to customise solutions in partnership with each community.

A program's **theory of action** should be informed by:

- **Evidence in context**

- Your organisation's **Practice principles**

- **Contractual and regulatory requirements** tied to program funding, such as specific deliverables, requirements, and standards.

A **Program's implementation** will be shaped by your organisation's approach to **Levers of practice quality** (e.g. how your organisation approaches staff selection, training, and post training support)

Practice information

This part of your system determines what data will be collected to create the 'feedback loop' needed for continuous practice improvement. Three types of information are crucial:

- **Client outcomes:** The intended outcomes for service users and the intermediate steps needed to reach them. This information confirms whether your programs are truly effective.

- **Fidelity of practice:** The degree to which a specific practice has been carried out the way it was originally designed and intended. By having processes to capture this information, your organisation can work out if sub-optimal program outcomes are stemming from design or implementation issues, and where improvement efforts are most needed.

- **Quality of implementation:** How effectively implementation activities, such as training and coaching, are being carried out as planned. This data shows whether your support systems for implementation need adjustments or a complete redesign.

Example of a practice information data set

A family service program aims to enhance the safety, development and wellbeing of children in families experiencing disadvantage and adversity. It's 'theory of change' envisioned achieving these outcomes for children by strengthening parenting skills and confidence, improving parenting coping skills, and increasing family connectedness to the community.

The agency decided to measure these outcomes using the Personal Wellbeing Index[26] for parents and children and the Parenting Empowerment and Efficacy Measure[27] (which measures parenting confidence and confidence in connecting with the community).

A bespoke session checklist was also developed for practitioners to use after every session to monitor fidelity of practice.

Practice improvement

This part of your system sets out how data will be used to identify areas for potential improvement and to track whether improvement is being made. Types of information include:

- **Practice improvement processes:** Structured methods for improving practice, such as Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles.
- **Information sharing and learning:** Managing and communicating knowledge to spread learning throughout your organisation.

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[26] Australian Centre on Quality of Life (2024)

[27] Freiberg, Homel, & Branch (2014)

Appendix D: Glossary

Accountability: Accountability involves accepting responsibility for outcomes, as well as the decisions and actions that lead to them. It involves being transparent, open, and willing to explain these actions and results to the person or group to whom one is accountable. Accountability demonstrates a commitment to honesty, ethical standards, and continuous improvement.

Board: A "group of people with overall responsibility and ultimate accountability for the organisation." This includes being responsible and accountable for any actions decisions that impact on high-quality and safe practice.[28]

Clinical governance: A coordinated approach used widely in healthcare that helps an organisation achieve safe, high-quality clinical care and outcomes. This approach brings together key people and processes to achieve these goals, such as leadership, staff responsibilities, policies and procedures, and quality improvement processes.[29]

Component of practice governance: A practice governance framework is made up of five key components: leadership and culture, vision for practice, practice principles, levers of practice quality, and roles and responsibilities. A component is a core part of a practice governance approach that works and connects with other parts in a coordinated way.

Dimensions of organisational culture: The four dimensions of organisational culture that underpin practice improvement: just, wellbeing, learning, and adaptive. These are inter-related and influence each other. All dimensions are equally important for establishing a culture that supports practice improvement.

Ground-up change: A form of organisational change where practitioners are meaningfully involved in driving continuous practice improvement and their practice insights are harnessed and nurtured to drive more robust, sustainable improvements. This can be viewed as a shift in an organisation's 'change focus' from top-down to ground-up, and can foster change that emerges naturally as an adaptive response to a changing environment.[30]

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[28] Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (2019b)

[29] Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (2019a)

[30] Burnes (2009); Weick (2012)

Governance: The systems and processes an organisation uses to run, manage, and control itself, and the ways holds itself and its people accountable."[31]

Implementation: A set of purposeful activities, methods, and strategies that are used to embed a practice, program, framework, or intervention in everyday work.[32]

Installation: A set of activities, methods, and strategies that are used to assess and create 'readiness' within an organisation in relation to a specific change or innovation. It involves building the necessary environment and individual and collective capacities to support implementation.[33]

Intended outcome: The ultimate impact or result achieved for the service user due to participating in the program or service.

Leadership and culture: One of the five key components of a practice governance approach and framework. It outlines the beliefs, values, and behaviours that your organisation believes are essential for improving practice. It should be seen as the core of what your organisation stands for and lives by.

Levers of practice quality: The tools and processes that your organisation can use to achieve high-quality practice.[34] Levers provide ways to improve practice quality and keep driving positive changes. They are one of the five key components of a practice governance approach and framework.

Mission: A statement that explains an organisation's purpose and why it exists. It outlines the organisation's goals and how they will be achieved. While a mission statement focuses on the 'here and now' by describing the organisation's purpose and what it's doing to reach its goals, an organisational vision statement outlines where it aims to go in the future.

Organisational culture: An organisation's culture includes the beliefs, values, and guidelines that help everyone know how to work together.

Outcomes: Outcomes are the ultimate results of an organisation's activities for service users or communities. They differ from outputs, which are the activities an organisation does or achieves to help it reach its intended outcomes. An example of an outcome might be that children are socially and emotionally ready to start school.

Outputs: The activities an organisation does or achieves to help it reach its intended outcomes. An example of an output might be the number of service users that received a service during a reporting period.

Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles: A scientific method for rapidly testing a change by planning it (Plan), trying it (Do), observing the results (Study), and acting on what is learned (Act). After a change is tested thoroughly, the cycles can be used to spread or implement the change.

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[31] Australian Institute of Company Directors (2019); Governance Institute of Australia (2024, para 1)

[32] National Implementation Research Network (2024)

[33] National Implementation Research Network (2024)

[34] Life Without Barriers (2023, p. 16)

Practice governance framework: A guide for community-based child and family services

Practice: The intentional action of connecting and relationship building with someone to achieve a specific outcome.

Practice champion: A practice champion is someone who actively supports, advocates for, and leads the use of 'best practices' in an organisation. They drive change and improvement through their informal influence on others, leading by example, and mentoring and helping peers to use the approaches.[35]

Practice fidelity: The degree to which a specific practice has been carried out the way it was originally designed and intended. It measures whether a practice has 'stayed true' to its original plan or intention.

Practice governance: The way an organisation supports and improves the quality of practice, aiming for better outcomes for service users and communities.

Practice governance framework: Explains how an organisation will drive continuous improvement in practice. It is the blueprint that guides the development and implementation of everyday activities, processes, and systems for supporting practice. Organisations usually create a practice governance framework to document their practice governance approach at an organisation-wide level.

Practice governance system: A coordinated set of actions, activities or processes that need to be implemented by an organisation to carry out effective practice governance. It includes creating a 'line of sight' between practice and the outcomes achieved for service users. A practice governance framework is your organisation's blueprint for practice governance, while the practice governance system is how your organisation will put this blueprint into action.

Practice principles: One of the five key components of a practice governance approach and framework. Practice principles define what high-quality practice looks like for everyone in your organisation. These shared principles outline the essential features of quality practice, uniting your organisation by guiding actions and decisions.

Program: A structured set of activities that have been designed to reach specific outcomes or goals; examples of programs include child and family services, aged care, and disability, as each of these are made up of coordinated activities that work towards fulfilling a particular goal.

Program theory of action: The specific practices that are needed to achieve a program's 'theory of change'. It is about what the program will do to bring its 'theory of change' to life.

Program theory of change: A detailed plan outlining the steps needed to achieve a program's desired outcomes and the mechanisms that will create that change. That is, an outline of the outcomes that are being sought and the predicted 'pathways of change' leading from a program's activities to its intended outcomes for service users.

Readiness: A stage in an organisation's journey where it is willing and able to take part in a particular change or activity.[36]

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[35] Morena, Gaias, & Larkin (2022)

[36] National Implementation Research Network (2024)

Practice governance framework: A guide for community-based child and family services

Roles and responsibilities: One of the five key components of a practice governance approach and framework. This component explains how each person in your organisation helps to support and improve the quality of practice.

Service user: A person who receives services offered by an organisation (i.e. clients, consumers).

System: A set of connected parts designed to achieve a specific purpose within an organisation.

Values (organisational): A set of core beliefs or principles that inspire and guide an organisation's members in their day-to-day thinking, actions, interactions, and decisions.

Vision (organisational): A future-focused and aspirational statement that communicates what an organisation is striving for, and hoping to, achieve.[37] While an organisation's mission statement is focused on the 'here and now' by describing its purpose and what it's doing to reach its goals, an organisational vision outlines where it hopes to go next.

Vision for practice: A statement that describes your organisation's core aspirations for practice and how it works with people, reflecting its identity, values, and purpose. It differs from your 'organisational vision,' which concentrates on the organisation's broad high-level goals, such as what outcomes it wants to see and what being 'successful' would look like. A 'vision for practice' is more specific than the 'organisational vision' because it zooms in on practice itself and the relationships between your organisation and the people it serves. It is one of the five key components of a practice governance approach and framework.

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[37] Australian Institute of Company Directors (2019)