

Cultural Responsivity in Practice:

Continuing Competence Guidelines for Nova Scotia Psychologists

Note on organizational transition: The Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology (NSBEP) is now the Nova Scotia Regulator of Psychology (NSRP), following the coming into force of the Regulated Health Professions Act (RHPA). This document was adopted under the former name; references to NSBEP throughout should be read as NSRP.

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Guidelines for Continuing Competence in Cultural Responsivity

PREAMBLE

Many licensing bodies for psychology have begun to require continuing competence (CC) requirements related to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Reconciliation, Accessibility, and Social Justice. These include licensing bodies in the United Kingdom (Health and Care Professions Council), Australia (Psychology Board of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency), some U.S. states (e.g., California, New York, Minnesota), and Canada (i.e., Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island).

Similarly, as of May 13, 2025, the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology (NSBEP) will require at least two hours of CC credits related to equity, diversity, and cultural responsiveness.

BACKGROUND IN THE CANADIAN CODE OF ETHICS AND CPA RESPONSE TO THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION REPORT

The Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (2017) emphasizes psychologists' role in non-discrimination, moral rights, and the protection of vulnerable individuals and groups. The Code is centered on the fundamental principle of respect for human dignity and emphasizes that every individual deserves equal moral consideration regardless of personal characteristics. It is incumbent on psychologists to protect individuals' fundamental rights, including privacy, self-determination, and cultural identity. Moreover, the Code places special emphasis on protecting vulnerable populations, requiring psychologists to establish safeguards for those with limited autonomy or facing systemic disadvantages. And it recognizes that individual identity is deeply connected to cultural and community contexts. Ultimately, the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists aims to ensure psychological practice promotes dignity, fairness, and respect for all individuals, with a particular focus on those most vulnerable.

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA)'s Report responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (CPA and the Psychology Foundation of Canada, 2018), is especially relevant. In this report, CPA provided a statement of accountability and responsibility to Indigenous Peoples on behalf of the profession of psychology. It acknowledged that the roots of psychology, reflective of colonial understandings, privilege Western epistemology and continue to perpetuate practices and policies that harm and marginalize Indigenous Peoples. And it called on the psychologists to be accountable for our profession's marginalization of the Indigenous Peoples of Canada.

A path to true accountability calls upon us, as psychologists, to answer for our unethical conduct, both collectively as a discipline, and individually as practitioners, scholars, teachers, and researchers.

In order to be accountable as a profession, psychologists must engage in critical self-reflection and evaluation of their skills and performance, particularly in relation to how their work impacts others. This is especially crucial when the population that is receiving

services is vulnerable or already marginalized. When psychologists make errors or act in ways that add to, rather than diminish, oppression, they are obliged to take corrective measures (CPA and the Psychology Foundation of Canada, 2018, p. 9).

Following from their statement of accountability, CPA specified six guiding principles for psychologists: cultural allyship; humility; collaboration; critical reflection; respect; and social justice. More specifically, psychologists must actively stand with Indigenous Peoples, understanding their epistemologies, cultural contexts, and deconstructing mainstream psychological assumptions (cultural allyship). Psychologists must approach Indigenous ways of knowing with respect, acknowledging that their traditional training may have marginalized alternative perspectives (humility). Services must be co-created through ongoing community discourse, involving Indigenous leaders, Elders, and healers from the initial planning stages and allowing for community feedback (collaboration). Psychologists must also "self-locate" by understanding their own cultural background, be willing to unlearn biased training, and remain open to Indigenous approaches (critical reflection). Psychologists must deeply respect Indigenous culture, knowledge systems, and personal experiences, recognizing the profession's historical risks of misunderstanding or misdiagnosing Indigenous clients (respect). And, according to the final guiding principle, psychologists should carefully examine power dynamics, community benefits, and ownership of data, striving to address historical inequities and support Indigenous communities' wellbeing (social justice).

Although CPA's report articulated the guiding principles of cultural allyship, humility, collaboration, critical reflection, respect, and social justice as they apply to psychologists working with Indigenous Peoples, these principles can – and should – be applied to psychologists work with all individuals and communities from all vulnerable and marginalized groups.

The CPA Report follows the guiding principles by describing how they are relevant to eight specific areas within the discipline of psychology (i.e., assessment, treatment, research, education, program development, program evaluation, advocacy and social justice), with the goal of providing practical direction to psychologists in their day-to-day work in these areas.

Registrants are strongly encouraged to read both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Report (2015) and Psychology's Response to it (CPA and the Psychology Foundation of Canada, 2018). Links to both are provided in the reference section of this document.

RATIONALE

Consistent with the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists, and Psychology's Response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, and our profession's commitment to protection, reconciliation, and **culturally responsive**, it is incumbent on psychologists to provide care for individuals and communities that have been historically, structurally, and/or systemically, marginalized, and/or underrepresented and underserved. This includes any individuals and communities affected by social disparities and inequities. Indeed, psychologists working in Nova

Scotia must be able to provide competent care to Nova Scotians' with diverse identities and backgrounds. As such, they must have knowledge, skills, and attitudes that allow them to provide care to individuals and communities from a range of cultural backgrounds, including (yet not limited to) the following: Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous Peoples; Nova Scotians who are Black and/or of African descent or are otherwise racialized; newcomers, including migrants and refugees; gender and sexual minorities; persons with disabilities; neurodivergent persons; socioeconomically disadvantaged groups; and religious minorities. NSBEP recognizes that no list can capture every population that experiences systemic barriers and inequalities, and that social identities and experiences of marginalization are fluid, diverse, **intersectional**, and context-dependent.

As well as ensuring that psychologists provide collaborative and **culturally responsive care**, they are encouraged to engage in ongoing **reflective** and **reflexive learning** related to working with people from diverse and marginalized identities and backgrounds. Psychologists are encouraged to adapt an approach of **cultural humility**, recognizing and critically examining the impact of their own beliefs, experiences, values, cultural identity, **positionality**, and ways of learning and knowing on their professional identity and practice, as well as reflecting on and learning from their clients and others' unique experiences.

Psychologists must be inclusive and affirming of all forms of individual and cultural diversity in clients, trainees, research participants, colleagues, and the general public. These forms of diversity include, yet are not limited to age, cognitive capacity, class, culture, disability, educational attainment, ethnicity, family status, immigration status, language, gender, gender identity and expression, physical attributes, sexual orientation and identity, race, social and/or economic status, and religion. It is incumbent on psychologists to understand the history of psychological theories and practice as well as how the field of psychology has been, and in many cases continues to be, complicit in the perpetuation of discriminatory practices, policies, and laws.

DEFINITIONS

Culture is a shared system of beliefs, values, rituals, practices, and behaviours that distinguish a group of people. Culture is integrated through languages, social norms, traditions, art, spiritual practices, and ways of understanding the world. It provides communities with a framework for social interaction, social justice, identity, and meaning. Culture continuously and reflexively evolves through interactions, social movements, technological advancements, and/or blending with or incursion of other cultures.

Culturally appropriate care refers to care that is aligned with the values, traditions, and norms of a particular culture. It relates to ensuring actions are respectful and considerate within a given cultural context.

Culturally competent care refers to the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with individuals from cultures or belief systems different from one's own. It highlights the capacity to understand and the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Reflective learning involves reflecting on one's experience and analyzing how one can make sense of that experience and use it to improve their practice and behaviour.

Reflexive learning includes deeper self-awareness and critical examination of one's own role in the learning process, including how personal biases, assumptions, and power dynamics influence learning. It typically incorporates an awareness of social, cultural, and emotional factors that influence the content being learned and the learning process itself.

Cultural humility is an approach to understanding and interacting with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds that emphasizes the continuous reflection on one's own cultural identities, biases, and assumptions.

Cultural responsiveness involves understanding and appropriately including and responding to the combination of cultural variables and the full range of dimensions of diversity that an individual brings to interactions.

Intersectionality, a term coined by Black feminist civil rights advocate Kimberlé Crenshaw, refers to the way that multiple forms of social identity – including, yet not limited to, race, class, gender, sexual identity, ability, and mental health – interact to create complex and unique experiences of privilege or oppression. The term underscores that social identities can not be understood in isolation from one another.

Positionality refers to the way a person's social, cultural, and historical context, which is shaped by factors such as, yet not limited to, race, class, gender, sexual identity, and ability, shapes their experiences with the world. It acknowledges that a person's perspectives and interactions are influenced by their position within social structures of privilege and power.

CC REQUIREMENT

In accordance with the documents and rationale identified above, NSBEP requires that psychologists who are registered in Nova Scotia complete **two CC credit hours per year** on the topic of culturally responsive care.

Cultural responsiveness requires valuing diversity, seeking to further cultural knowledge, and working toward the creation of spaces where diversity is valued (Hopf et al., 2021). It also includes understanding and appropriately including and responding to the combination of cultural variables and the full range of dimensions of diversity that an individual brings to interactions.

NSBEP's focus is on the development of cultural responsiveness in that this concept involves actively adapting to the unique individual and cultural needs of each client. **Cultural responsiveness requires cultural humility and cultural competence.** Thus, the emphasis of

these CC credits is on both increasing reflective and reflexive learning (to develop cultural humility) as well as knowledge and skills (to develop cultural competence).

1. Registrants are required to complete two CC credits in the area of cultural responsiveness each year: One credit must be in the area of reflective and reflexive learning (to develop cultural humility); the other must be in the area of knowledge and skill development (to further cultural competence). Examples of each are provided below.
- **Reflective and Reflexive Learning.** To meet this requirement, registrants are required to participate in learning focused on enhancing their cultural humility through reflective and reflexive learning. The intention is that this learning is relational and participatory, that is, registrants are encouraged to actively engage in activities that require them to reflect on their own experiences and enhance their understanding through personal involvement. These activities should be characterized by active participation and reflection. Participants are encouraged to make their practice deliberate and/or intentional, and document their processes and/or reflections.

Examples of activities that would meet this requirement include the following:

- connecting with community through cultural events;
 - participating in ceremonial activities (by invitation);
 - receiving teachings from Elders or Knowledge Holders;
 - reading and/or engaging with other forms of media that reflects the narratives and experiences of marginalized individuals and communities; and
 - workshops and professional trainings that include relational, participatory, and/or reflective components.
- **Knowledge and Skills.** To meet this requirement, registrants are required to participate in learning focused on developing their knowledge of and skills in providing culturally appropriate and culturally competent care. Examples of activities that would meet this requirement include the following:
 - conference, course, lecture, seminar, workshop, or other professional training (virtual or in-person; synchronous or asynchronous);
 - readings; and
 - professional consultation from community experts

2. In order to cultivate a holistic and multifaceted understanding of ***cultural responsiveness***, registrants are encouraged to grow their knowledge and skills, and enhance their ***cultural humility*** with various marginalized and underserved populations each year. Registrants are encouraged to notice and engage with areas of unawareness and bias to purposefully address gaps in their knowledge, skills, and experience.

3. Registrants are required to document their learning activities as part of their annual CC records. Compliance will be monitored as part of NSBEP's CC program.

Evaluation and Feedback

The NSBEP invites psychologists to provide feedback on their cultural competency continuing education experience, reflecting on how their learning has impacted their professional practice. This feedback will help refine future training guidelines and ensure ongoing relevance to the evolving needs of psychologists and the communities they serve.

For resources and recommendations for learning and professional development, please see the references and resource list.

REFERENCES

- Canadian Psychological Association. (2017). *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists* (4th ed.). Canadian Psychological Association.
<https://cpa.ca/aboutcpa/committees/ethics/codeofethics/>
- Canadian Psychological Association, & Psychology Foundation of Canada. (2018). *Psychology's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Report*. Canadian Psychological Association.
https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Task_Forces/TRC%20Task%20Force%20Report_FINAL.pdf
- Hopf, S. C., Crowe, K., Verdon, S., Blake, H. L., & McLeod, S. (2021). Advancing workplace diversity through the culturally responsive teamwork framework. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 30(5), 1949–1961. https://doi.org/10.1044/2021_AJSLP-20-00380
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.
<https://nctr.ca/records/reports/>

Resource List

General

- [CCTC Social Responsiveness Toolkit for Health Service Psychology Education and Training](#)

Indigenous History and Studies

- [Beyond 94: Truth and Reconciliation in Canada.](#) This interactive site monitors the progress on the TRC 94's Calls to Action
- [National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation 94 Calls to Action](#)
- [Indigenous Canada](#) is an Open Online Course through the University of Alberta that provides an overview of Indigenous histories and perspectives.
- [Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre](#)
- [Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#)
- Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- [Assembly of First Nations – It's Our Time First Nations Tool Kit](#)
- Decolonizing Trauma Work: Indigenous Stories and Strategies by [Renee Linklater](#)
- <https://achh.ca/education/>

Race

- Decolonizing Therapy: Oppression, Historical Trauma, and Politicizing Your Practice by Dr. Jennifer Mullan
- Black Families in Therapy: Understanding the African American Experience by Nancy Boyd-Franklin
- [Inclusive Therapists.](#) A website full of resources and Professional CEU Trainings
- Healing Racial Trauma: The Road to Resilience by Sheila Wise Rowe
- My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies by Resmaa Menakem
- [Black Mental Health Canada](#)
- [Multicultural Mental Health Resource Centre](#)
- [Asian Mental Health Collective](#)

Gender & Sexuality

- Gender Trauma: Healing Cultural, Social, and Historical Gendered Trauma by Dr. Alex Iantaffi
- A Clinician's Guide to Gender Affirming Care: Working with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Clients by Dr. Sand C. Chang, Dr. Anneliese A. Sing, and Dr. lore m. dickey
- Polyamory: A Clinical Toolkit for Therapists (and Their Clients) by Martha Kauppi

- Queering Your Therapy Practice: Queer Theory, Narrative Therapy, and Imagining New Identities by Julie Tilsen
- The Care We Dream Of: Liberatory & Transformative Approaches to LGBTQ+ Health Edited by Zena Sharman
- [AASECT](#): Full of resources on training on gender, sex, and sexuality

Ableism

- [Am I Ableist?](#) A local website full of resources for Healthcare professionals
- [Therapist Neurodiversity Collective](#): Website full of resources on Neurodivergence and offers trainings
- [Neurodivergent Insights](#): Website full of resources for clients and clinicians, as well as worksheets and online trainings for therapists
- [Truths of Institutionalization: Past and Present](#)- 6 interactive modules outlining the historical timeline to current day of institutionalization of disabled people in Canada.
- [Invisible Institutions](#)- Documentary podcast that explores past and current experiences of institutions for disabled people in Canada.

Deaf Culture

- Mental Health and Deafness by Margaret du Feu and Cathy Chovaz
- [National Deaf Center](#)