

# **Standards for Providers of Psychological Services**

Adapted from the “Standards for Providers of Psychological Services”, Canadian Psychological Association and ratified by the Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology.

## Preamble

Since the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology has the right to regulate psychology only, these Standards are to be understood to refer to psychological services and training (as opposed to services and training in other professions), even where the adjective “psychological” is not explicitly used, and psychological service units are not intended to interfere with the larger organizational structure in which they are embedded.

Questions of interpretation should be addressed to the Board as they are in respect of the Act, Regulations, Guidelines and Code of Ethics.

## Principles and Implications of Standards

A few basic principles have guided the development of these Standards.

These are:

There should be a single set of standards that govern psychological service functions offered by psychologists, regardless of their specialty, or setting or form of remuneration. All psychologists should be guided by a uniform set of standards just as they are guided by a common code of ethics.

There should be a uniform set of standards governing the quality of services to all users of psychological services in both the private and public sectors.

Standards should clearly establish minimally-acceptable levels of quality for covered psychological service functions regardless of the nature of the users, purchasers or sanctioners of such covered services.

All persons providing psychological services shall meet minimally-acceptable levels of training and experience, which are consistent and appropriate with the functions they perform. Responsibility and accountability for services provided by or under supervision of psychologists must rest with psychologists who are registered in the province of Nova Scotia. Those providing psychological services who have lesser (or other) levels of training should be supervised by a psychologist to assure that the public receives services of high quality.

While assuring the user of the psychologist’s accountability for the nature and quality of services rendered, standards must not constrain the psychologist

from employing new methods or making flexible use of support personnel in the delivery of services.

The Standards here presented have broad implications both for the public who use psychological services and for providers of such services.

Standards provide a basis for a mutual understanding between provider and user and facilitate effective evaluation of services provided and outcomes achieved.

Standards are an important step towards uniformity in legislative and regulatory actions involving providers of psychological services and provide the basis for the development of accreditation procedures where appropriate.

Standards for the provision of psychological services influence what is considered acceptable structure, budgeting, and staffing patterns within facilities providing psychological services.

Systematically applied, standards serve to establish uniformly the minimally acceptable levels of psychological services. They serve to establish effective and consistent bases for evaluating the performance of individual service providers, and to guide the organizing of psychological service.

Standards give specific content to the profession's concept of ethical principles and provide direction for training models in psychology.

Standards require periodic review and revision.

## Definitions

Providers of Psychological Services refers to the following person:

- (a) Psychologists: Psychologists are persons registered as such by the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology.
- (b) Persons who carry out psychological services under the supervision of a psychologist.

Psychological Services refers to services provided by or under the direction of a psychologist. Psychological services include one or more of the following:

- (a) Psychological evaluation, diagnosis, assessment and interpretation of data concerning the functioning of individuals, groups and organizations in a variety of settings and activities.
- (b) Psychological interventions to facilitate the functioning of individuals, groups and organizations. Such interventions may include psychotherapy, counseling, process consultation and research.
- (c) Teaching of and/or research in psychology.

- (d) Consultation relating to a, b, and c, above.
- (e) Program development of services in the areas of a, b, c, and d, above.
- (f) Supervision in the areas of a, b, c, d, and e, above.

A Psychological Service Unit is the structure through which psychological services are provided.

- (a) A Psychological Service Unit provides predominantly psychological services and is composed of one or more psychologists.
- (b) A Psychological Service Unit is an autonomous service which may operate independently or as a functional or geographic component of a larger organizational unit.

User Includes:

- (a) Direct users or recipients of psychological services.
- (b) Public and private institutions, facilities or organizations receiving psychological services.
- (c) Third-party purchasers – those who pay for the delivery of services but who are not recipients of services.

Sanctioners refers to those users and nonusers who have a legitimate concern with the accessibility, timeliness, efficacy, and standards of quality attending the provision of psychological services. In addition to the users, sanctioners may include members of the user's family, the court, the probation officer, the school administrator, the employer, the union representative, the facility director, etc. Another class of sanctioners is represented by various governmental, peer review, and accreditation bodies concerned with the assurance of quality.

## Standard 1. Providers

1.1 EACH PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT OFFERING PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES SHALL HAVE AVAILABLE AT LEAST ONE PSYCHOLOGIST AND AS MANY MORE PSYCHOLOGISTS AS ARE NECESSARY TO ASSURE THE QUALITY OF SERVICES OFFERED.

Interpretation: The intent of this Standard is that one or more providers of psychological service in any Psychological Service Unit shall meet the levels of training and experience of the psychologist as specified in the preceding Definitions.

When a psychologist is not available on a full time basis, the facility shall retain the services of one or more psychologists on a regular part-time basis to supervise the psychological services provided. The psychologist(s) so retained shall have authority and participate sufficiently to enable him/her to assess the needs for services, review the content of services provided and assume professional responsibility and accountability for them.

1.2 PROVIDERS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES WHO DO NOT MEET THE REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION SHALL BE SUPERVISED BY A

PSYCHOLOGIST WHO SHALL ASSUME PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE SERVICES PROVIDED. THE LEVEL AND EXTENT OF SUPERVISION MAY VARY FROM TASK TO TASK SO LONG AS THE SUPERVISING PSYCHOLOGIST RETAINS A SUFFICIENTLY CLOSE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP TO MEET THIS STANDARD.

1.3 WHEREVER A PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT EXISTS, A PSYCHOLOGIST SHALL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR PLANNING, DIRECTING AND REVIEWING THE PROVISION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES.

Interpretation: This psychologist shall coordinate the activities of the psychological service unit with other professional, administrative and technical groups both within and outside the facility. This psychologist, who may be the director, chief or coordinator of the Psychological Service Unit, has related responsibilities including but not limited to, recruiting qualified staff, directing training and research activities of the service, maintaining a high level of professional and ethical practice and assuring that staff members function only within the areas of their competency.

In order to facilitate the effectiveness of services by increasing the level of staff sensitivity and professional skills, the psychologist designated as director shall be responsible for participating in the selection of staff whose qualification and skills (e.g. language, cultural and experiential background) are directly relevant to the needs and characteristics of the users served.

1.4 WHEN FUNCTIONING AS PART OF AN ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING, PSYCHOLOGISTS SHALL BRING THEIR BACKGROUNDS AND SKILLS TO BEAR WHENEVER APPROPRIATE UPON THE GOALS OF THE ORGANIZATION BY PARTICIPATING IN THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT OF OVERALL SERVICES.

Interpretation: Psychologists shall participate in the maintenance of high professional standards by representation on Committees concerned with psychological services.

As appropriate to the setting, these activities may include active participation as voting and as office-holding members on the facility's executive, planning, and evaluation boards and committees.

1.5 PSYCHOLOGISTS SHALL MAINTAIN A KNOWLEDGE THAT IS CURRENT AND DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE SERVICES THEY RENDER.

Interpretation: Methods through which knowledge of scientific and professional development may be gained include, but are not limited to, continuing education, attendance at workshops, participation in staff development and reading scientific publications.

The psychologist shall have ready access to reference material related to the provision of psychological services.

Psychologists must be prepared to show evidence that they are staying abreast of current knowledge and practices through continuing education.

1.6 PSYCHOLOGISTS SHALL LIMIT THEIR DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO THOSE AREAS OF COMPETENCE AS DEFINED BY VERIFIABLE TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE.

Interpretation: In the event that a psychologist chooses to expand services beyond the range of those usually delivered, the psychologist shall obtain pertinent training and/or appropriate professional supervision.

1.7 PSYCHOLOGISTS WHO WISH TO CHANGE THEIR SERVICE SPECIALTY OR TO ADD AN ADDITIONAL AREA OF SPECIALIZATION MUST MEET THE SAME REQUIREMENTS WITH RESPECT TO SUBJECT MATTER AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS THAT APPLY TO A POST-GRADUATE TRAINING IN THE NEW SPECIALTY.

Interpretation: Training psychologists to qualify them for change in specialty will be under the auspices of appropriate institutions that offer post-graduate training in that specialty. Such training should be individualized, due credit being given for relevant course work or requirements that have previously been satisfied. For example, merely taking an internship or acquiring experience in a practicum setting is not considered adequate preparation for becoming a clinical, counseling, industrial-organizational or school psychologist when prior training has not been in the relevant area. Fulfillment of such an individualized training programme may be attested by the award of a certificate by the supervising department or professional school indicating the successful completion of preparation in the particular specialty.

## Standard 2. Programmes

2.1 COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT:

2.1.1 THE COMPOSITION AND PROGRAMMES OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT SHALL BE RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF THE PERSONS OR SETTINGS SERVED.

Interpretation: A Psychological Service Unit shall be so structured as to facilitate effective and economical delivery of services. For example, a Psychological Service Unit serving a predominantly low income, ethnic or racial minority group should have a service programme that is adapted to the age, gender, linguistic, experiential and attitudinal characteristics of the users.

2.1.2 A DESCRIPTION OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT AND ITS LINES OF RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE DELIVERY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES SHALL BE AVAILABLE IN

WRITTEN FORM TO STAFF OF THE UNIT AND TO USERS AND SANCTIONERS UPON REQUEST.

Interpretation: The description should include lines of responsibility, supervisory relationships, and the level and extent of accountability for each person who provides psychological services.

2.1.3. A PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT SHALL INCLUDE SUFFICIENT NUMBERS OF PROFESSIONAL AND SUPPORT PERSONNEL TO ACHIEVE ITS GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSES.

Interpretation: The workload and diversity of psychological services required and the specific goals and objectives of the setting will determine the numbers of professional and support personnel in the Psychological Service Unit. Where shortages in personnel exist so that psychological services cannot be rendered in a professional manner, the Director of the Psychological Service Unit shall initiate action to modify appropriately the specific goals and objectives of the Service.

## 2.2 POLICIES:

2.2.1. A PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT SHALL DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN A WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ITS OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF SERVICES.

Interpretation: The Psychological Service Unit shall review its objectives and scope of service annually and revise them as necessary to ensure that the psychological services offered are consistent with staff competencies and current psychological knowledge and practice. This statement should be distributed to staff and, where appropriate, to users and sanctioners upon request.

2.2.2. ALL PROVIDERS WITHIN A PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT SHALL SUPPORT THE LEGAL AND CIVIL RIGHTS OF THE USER.

Interpretation: Providers of psychological services shall safeguard the interests of the user with regard to personal, legal and civil rights. They shall continually be sensitive to the issue of confidentiality of information, the short-term and long-term impact of their decisions and recommendations, and other matters pertaining to individual, legal and civil rights. Concerns regarding the safeguarding of users include, but are not limited to issues related to gender and age bias, sexual harassment, problems of minors or legal incompetents, discriminatory practices in employment selection procedures, recommendations for special education provisions, information relative to adverse personnel actions in the armed services and the adjudication of domestic relations disputes in divorce and custodial proceedings. Providers of psychological services should take affirmative action by making themselves available for local committees, review boards, and similar advisory groups established to safeguard the human, civil, and legal rights of service users.

2.2.3. ALL PROVIDERS WITHIN A PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT SHALL BE FAMILIAR WITH AND BE GOVERNED BY THE CODE OF ETHICS FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS AND OTHER OFFICIAL POLICY STATEMENTS RELEVANT TO STANDARDS FOR PROVIDERS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES ISSUED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF PSYCHOLOGISTS OF NOVA SCOTIA AND THE NOVA SCOTIA BOARD OF EXAMINERS IN PSYCHOLOGY.

Interpretation: The psychologist responsible for the unit shall ensure that the Code of Ethics, Standards for Providers, and other such policy documents endorsed by the Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology will be incorporated into the policy of the service unit and that all providers within the unit shall be governed by these principles. A copy of each of these documents shall be available upon request to all providers of psychological services, to users and to sanctioners.

2.2.4. ALL PROVIDERS WITHIN A PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT SHALL CONFORM TO RELEVANT STATUTES ESTABLISHED BY FEDERAL, PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.

Interpretation: All providers of psychological services shall be familiar with appropriate statutes regulating the practice of psychology. They shall also be informed about agency regulations that have the force of law and that relate to the delivery of psychological services: for example, evaluation for disability retirement and special education placements. In addition, all providers shall be cognizant that federal and provincial agencies have policy statements regarding psychological services. Providers of Psychological services shall be familiar with these and other statutes and regulations, including those addressed to the civil and legal rights of users which are pertinent to their scope of practice.

2.2.5. ALL PROVIDERS WITHIN A PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT SHALL, WHERE APPROPRIATE, INFORM THEMSELVES ABOUT AND USE THE NETWORK OF SERVICES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES IN ORDER TO LINK USERS WITH RELEVANT SERVICES AND RESOURCES.

Interpretation: It is incumbent upon psychologists and supporting staff to be sensitive to the broader context of user needs. Where appropriate, providers shall make available information regarding human services such as legal aid societies, social services, employment agencies, health resources, educational and recreational facilities. When appropriate, the provider of psychological services shall also refer to such community resources and if necessary, actively intervene on behalf of the user.

2.2.6. THE PROVIDERS SHALL FOSTER A COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES, COWORKERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS.

Interpretation: It shall be the responsibility of the psychologist to recognize the areas of special competence of other psychologists and of other professionals for either consultation or referral purposes. Providers of psychological services shall make appropriate use of other professional, technical, and administrative

resources whenever these service the best interests of the user and shall establish and maintain cooperative arrangements with other such other resources as are required to meet the needs of users.

## 2.3 PROCEDURES

2.3.1. WHERE APPROPRIATE, EACH PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE UNIT SHALL BE GUIDED BY A SET OF WRITTEN PROCEDURAL GUIDELINES FOR THE DELIVERY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES.

Interpretation: Depending on the nature of the setting, providers should be prepared to make available a statement of procedural guidelines that can be understood by users as well as sanctioners. This statement may describe the current methods, forms, procedures, and techniques being used to achieve the objectives and goals for psychological services.

This statement shall be communicated to staff, and when appropriate, to users and sanctioners. The Psychological Service Unit shall provide for the annual review of its procedures for the delivery of psychological services.

2.3.2. PROVIDERS SHALL DEVELOP A PLAN FOR THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES APPROPRIATE TO THE NEEDS OF THE USER.

Interpretation: Whenever appropriate or mandated in the setting, this plan shall be in written form to provide a basis for establishing accountability, obtaining informed consent and providing a mechanism for subsequent peer review. It is desirable that a plan be developed that describes the psychological services indicated and the manner in which they will be provided.

A psychologist who provides services as one member of a collaborative effort shall participate in the development and implementation of the overall service plan and provide for its periodic review.

2.3.3. THERE SHALL BE A MUTUALLY ACCEPTABLE UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN THE PROVIDER AND USER OR RESPONSIBLE AGENT REGARDING THE DELIVERY OF SERVICE.

Interpretation: Varying service settings call for understandings differing in explicitness and formality. For instance, a psychologist providing services within a user organization may operate within a broad framework of understanding with this organization as a condition of employment. As another example, psychologists providing professional services to individuals in clinical, counseling, school or organizational settings require an open-ended agreement which specifies procedures and their known risks (if any), costs, and respective responsibilities of provider and user for achieving the agreed-upon objectives.

2.3.4. ACCURATE, CURRENT AND PERTINENT DOCUMENTATION SHALL BE MADE OF ESSENTIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES PROVIDED.

Interpretation: Records kept of psychological services may include, but not be limited to, identifying data, dates of services, types of services, and significant actions taken. Providers of psychological services shall ensure that essential information concerning services rendered is appropriately recorded within a reasonable time of their completion.

#### 2.3.5. PROVIDERS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES SHALL ESTABLISH A SYSTEM TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIALITY OF THEIR RECORDS.

Interpretation: Psychologists are responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of information about users of services whether obtained by themselves or by those they supervise. All persons supervised by psychologists, including nonprofessional personnel and students, who have access to records of psychological services shall be required to maintain this confidentiality as a condition of employment.

The psychologist shall not release confidential information, except with the written consent of the user directly involved or his legal representative. Even after the consent has been obtained for release, the psychologist should clearly identify such information as confidential to the recipient of the information. If directed otherwise by statute or regulations with the force of law or by court order, the psychologist shall seek a resolution to the conflict that is both ethically and legally feasible and appropriate.

Users shall be informed in advance of any limits in the setting for maintenance of confidentiality of psychological information. For instance, psychologists in hospital settings shall inform their patients that psychological information in a patient's clinical record may be available without the patient's written consent to other members of the professional staff associated with the patient's treatment or rehabilitation. Similar limitations on confidentiality of psychological information may be present in certain school, industrial or military settings, or in instances where the user has waived confidentiality for purposes of third party payment.

When the user intends to waive confidentiality, the psychologist should discuss the implications of releasing psychological information, and assist the user in limiting disclosure only to information required by the present circumstances.

Raw psychological data (e.g., test protocols, therapy or interview notes, questionnaire returns etc.) in which a user is identified shall be released only with the written consent of the user or legal representative and released only to a person recognized by the psychologist as competent to use the data.

Any use made of psychological reports, records or data for research or training purposes shall be consistent with the Standard. Additionally, providers of psychological services shall comply with statutory confidentiality requirements and those embodied in the Code of Ethics for Psychologists of the Canadian Psychological Association, the Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology.

Providers of psychological services should remain sensitive to both the benefits and the possible misuse of information regarding individuals that is stored in organizational data banks, standard and/or computerized. Providers should use their influence to ensure that such information is used in a socially responsible manner.

Standard 3. Accountability.

### 3.1 PSYCHOLOGISTS' PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITY SHALL BE GUIDED PRIMARILY BY THE PRINCIPLE OF PROMOTING HUMAN WELFARE.

Interpretation: Psychologists shall provide services to users in a manner that is considerate, effective and economical.

Psychologists are responsible for making their services readily accessible to users in a manner that facilitates the user's freedom of choice.

Psychologists shall be mindful of their accountability to the sanctioners of psychological services and to the general public, provided that appropriate steps are taken to protect the confidentiality of the service relationship. In the pursuit of their professional activities, they shall aid in the conservation of human, material, and financial resources.

The Psychological Service Unit will not withhold services to a potential client on the basis of that user's race, colour, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, or national origin. Recognition is given, however, to the following considerations: the professional right of psychologists to limit their practice to a specific category of user (e.g., children, adolescents, women); the right and responsibility of psychologists to withhold evaluative, psychotherapeutic, counseling or other services in specific instances where considerations of differences between psychologists and client (e.g., race, religion, gender) might impair the effectiveness of the relationship.

Psychologists who find that psychological services are being provided in a manner that is discriminatory or exploitative to users and/or contrary to these Standards or to provincial or federal statutes shall take appropriate corrective action, which may include refusal to provide services. When conflicts of interest arise, the psychologist shall be guided in the resolution of differences by the principles set forth in the Code of Ethics for Psychologists of the Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology.

### 3.2 PSYCHOLOGISTS SHALL PURSUE THEIR ACTIVITIES AS MEMBERS OF AN INDEPENDENT AUTONOMOUS PROFESSION.

Interpretation: Psychologists shall be aware of the implications of their activities for the profession as a whole. They shall seek to eliminate discriminatory practices instituted for self serving purposes that are not in the interest of the user (e.g., arbitrary requirements for referral and supervision by another

professional). They shall be cognizant of their responsibilities for the development of the profession, participate where possible in the training and career development of students and other providers, participate as appropriate in the training of paraprofessionals and integrate and supervise their contributions within the structure established for delivering psychological services. Where appropriate, they shall facilitate the development and periodic review of, and participate in, professional standards review mechanisms.

Psychologists shall seek to work with other professionals in the cooperative manner for the good of the user and the benefit of the general public. Psychologists associated with multidisciplinary settings shall support the principle that members of each participating professional shall have equal rights and opportunities to share all privileges and responsibilities of full membership in the service facility, and to administer service programs in their respective areas of competence.

### 3.3 THERE SHALL BE PERIODIC, SYSTEMATIC, AND EFFECTIVE EVALUATION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES.

Interpretation: When the Psychological Service Unit is a component of a larger organization, regular assessment of progress in achieving goals shall be provided in the service delivery plan, including consideration of the effectiveness of psychological services relative to costs in terms of time, money, the availability of professionals, support personnel and user needs.

Evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the psychological service delivery system should be conducted internally and, when possible, under independent auspices.

It is desirable that there be a periodic review of mechanisms to ensure that such evaluations are effective and cost-efficient and do not place unnecessary encumbrances upon the provider not unnecessary time or financial stress upon users or sanctioners.

### 3.4 PSYCHOLOGISTS ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR ALL ASPECTS OF THE SERVICES THEY PROVIDE AND SHALL BE RESPONSIVE TO THOSE CONCERNED WITH THESE SERVICES.

Interpretation: In recognizing their responsibilities to users, sanctioners, third-party purchasers and other providers, psychologists shall make information available about, and provide opportunity for participation in, decisions concerning such issues as initiation, termination, continuation, modification, and evaluation of psychological services when such is appropriate and consistent with the user's legal rights and privileged communications. The Standards for Providers of Psychological Services of the Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia and the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology shall also be made available upon request.

Accurate and full information shall be made available to prospective individual or organizational users regarding the qualifications of providers, the nature and extent of services offered and where appropriate, financial and social costs.

Where appropriate, psychologists shall inform users of their payment policies and their willingness to assist in obtaining reimbursement. Those who accept reimbursement from the third-party should be acquainted with the appropriate statutes and regulations, should inform their users of proper procedures for submitting claims and limits on confidentiality of claims information, in accordance with pertinent statutes.

#### Standard 4. Environment

4.1 PROVIDERS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES SHALL PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT IN THE SERVICE SETTING OF A PHYSICAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT THAT FACILITATES OPTIMAL HUMAN FUNCTIONING.

Interpretation: Federal, provincial and local requirements for safety, health and sanitation must be observed. Attention shall be given to the comfort and to the privacy of providers and users.

As providers of services, psychologists have the responsibility to be concerned with the environment of their service unit, especially as it affects the quality of service, but also as it impinges upon human functioning in the unit or organization when the service unit is included in such a larger context. Physical arrangements and organizational policies and procedures should be conducive to the human dignity, self-respect, and optimal functioning of both users and providers to the effective delivery of service. The atmosphere in which psychological services are rendered should be appropriate to the service, the setting and to the user.