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May 6, 2025

Dear Registrants,

Re: Summary of Consultation Survey on Entry to Practice Standards for Psychologists in Nova Scotia

We would like to present the findings of our consultation survey regarding the proposed changes to the entry-to-practice (ETP) standard for psychologists in Nova Scotia. The survey was conducted via email distribution to all registered psychologists with NSBEP between December 13, 2024, and January 5, 2025. After data cleaning to remove duplicate responses and those from individuals who had not engaged with the 2024 ETP submission, a total of 198 responses were analyzed (Masters: 81, Doctoral: 117).

Key Survey Findings

1. Support for Establishing and Supporting PsyD Programs in Nova Scotia

- 92.4% (183 respondents) agree with the recommendation to establish PsyD programs (Masters: 91.4%, Doctoral: 93.2%).

2. Support for Raising the Entry-to-Practice Standard to a Doctoral Degree

- 67.2% (133 respondents) support raising the standard to a doctoral degree (Masters: 34.6%, Doctoral: 89.7%).

3. Belief in the Doctoral Entry-to-Practice Standard Addressing Complex Mental Health Needs

- 62.1% (123 respondents) believe the change will improve psychologists' ability to meet Nova Scotia's growing mental health needs (Masters: 28.4%, Doctoral: 85.5%).

4. Agreement That Locally Funded PsyD Programs Will Improve Retention

- 77.8% (154 respondents) believe these programs will help retain psychologists in the province (Masters: 64.2%, Doctoral: 87.2%).

Differences Between Masters and Doctoral Practitioners

While it is not surprising that master's-level practitioners expressed less support for raising the entry-to-practice standard, the survey highlights a clear divergence between groups, particularly regarding the doctoral requirement for licensure. This division is expected given the different training pathways and their implications for current practitioners. However, it is essential to emphasize that this is fundamentally a matter of public protection rather than a democratic decision. We note that compared to previous efforts to raise the standard, overall support has increased, reflecting a shift in professional opinion. As a board, we recognize the valuable contributions of master's-trained clinicians and acknowledge the additional burden they face in meeting practice standards through increased supervision and ongoing professional development beyond their graduate training. At the same time, we must acknowledge that there are significant differences in the depth and breadth of

training between master's and doctoral programs, differences that are often not well understood by the public. By moving to a doctoral-level entry standard, we can provide greater clarity and assurance about the level of training psychologists receive, thereby reducing confusion and strengthening public trust. Moreover, it is important for the public to understand that all registered psychologists meet consistent foundational and competency standards, that Nova Scotia maintains a single-tier registration system, and that individual scopes of practice are shaped by experience and supervision rather than by initial degree level.

Detailed Question Analysis

The proposed PsyD programs would address critical gaps in mental health services across the province.

Response	Masters Practitioners	Doctoral Practitioners	Total (%)
Strongly Disagree	10 (12.3%)	1 (0.9%)	11 (5.6%)
Disagree	19 (23.5%)	9 (7.7%)	28 (14.1%)
Neutral	21 (25.9%)	14 (12.0%)	35 (17.7%)
Agree	18 (22.2%)	36 (30.8%)	56 (27.3%)
Strongly Agree	13 (16.0%)	56 (47.9%)	69 (34.8%)
Total Agree	62.1%		
Total Disagree	19.7%		

PsyD programs would provide the training needed to prepare psychologists for today's complex mental health landscape.

Response	Masters Practitioners	Doctoral Practitioners	Total (%)
Strongly Disagree	1 (1.2%)	1 (0.9%)	2 (1.0%)
Disagree	9 (11.1%)	8 (6.8%)	17 (8.6%)
Neutral	19 (23.5%)	10 (8.5%)	29 (14.6%)
Agree	38 (46.9%)	35 (29.9%)	73 (36.9%)
Strongly Agree	13 (16.0%)	61 (52.1%)	74 (37.4%)
Total Agree	74.3%		
Total Disagree	9.6%		

Summary of Qualitative Feedback:

Support for the Doctoral Entry-to-Practice Standard

- **Alignment with National Standards:** Many respondents emphasized the importance of consistency with other jurisdictions where doctoral entry is already the norm.

- **Enhanced Competency for Complex Needs:** The doctoral standard is seen as ensuring better preparation (increased education, training hours and supervision) for handling increasingly complex mental health cases.
- **Ethical and Professional Credibility:** Many believe the doctoral standard would enhance public trust and the professional credibility of psychologists.

Support for PsyD Programs in Nova Scotia

- **Addressing Workforce Gaps:** PsyD programs are viewed as a practical solution to training more psychologists efficiently.
- **Clinically Focused Training:** Respondents highlighted the value of PsyD programs in prioritizing hands-on clinical training over research-intensive PhD programs.
- **Accessibility and Flexibility:** Many see PsyD programs as a more accessible doctoral training route for those who do not wish to pursue traditional research-focused programs.

Concerns About Raising the ETP Standard

- **Shortage of Psychologists:** Some respondents expressed concerns that requiring a doctoral degree could exacerbate workforce shortages.
- **Financial and Accessibility Barriers:** Many raised concerns about the financial burden and reduced accessibility for students, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds.
- **Delayed Service Delivery:** Increasing the educational requirements may delay new professionals from entering the workforce.
- **Doubts About Effectiveness:** Some questioned whether requiring a doctorate would directly improve mental health outcomes.

Overall, there is strong support for PsyD program development and moderate support for the transition to a doctoral ETP standard. The divide between master's and doctoral-level practitioners was also evident in qualitative data, though expected, given the implications for each group. One of the key advantages of a doctoral-level entry standard is that it clearly differentiates psychologists from other mental health professionals. The depth of training, focus on evidence-based practice, and extensive supervision involved in doctoral programs provide a unique level of preparation that sets psychologists apart. Addressing ongoing concerns for all registrants through transparent communication and strategic planning will be essential in ensuring a sustainable and effective psychological practice community in Nova Scotia.

We also recognize that individuals seeking to enter the mental health field through shorter or less intensive training programs can still pursue other professional designations, such as becoming a Registered Counselling Therapist (RCT). These programs remain accessible, cost-effective, and valuable for those wishing to enter the workforce more quickly. Further, doctoral programs include additional research funding opportunities and paid doctoral residencies. By comparison, the move to a doctoral standard for psychologists is about ensuring the highest level of public protection and professional clarity. While concerns have been raised about fairness or accessibility, these arguments often overlook the broader system of mental health care, in which multiple paths remain available.

NSBEP is advancing the following key messages to the government to address the evolving needs of Nova Scotia's mental health system:

- **NSBEP Supports Expanding the Mental Health Workforce While Ensuring Competence:** While increasing the number of mental health professionals is critical, ensuring that psychologists with the appropriate training at entry to practice are in place is essential for public protection, particularly in high-risk cases and for those with severe mental health conditions.
- **Doctoral Level Training Addresses the Complexity of Today's Mental Health Needs:** Doctoral-level training ensures that psychologists entering the profession are equipped with the advanced skills at entry to practice required to handle the increasing complexity of mental health presentations in Nova Scotia.
- **Nova Scotia's Mental Health Infrastructure Needs Strengthening:** Investment in PsyD programs will create a sustainable pathway for training new psychologists, improve workforce retention, and expand access to publicly available mental health services through university-based training clinics.
- **A Balanced Model for Mental Health Services is Needed:** While multiple mental health professionals contribute to the system, psychologists have the expertise to provide the comprehensive assessments, diagnostics, and interventions necessary for the highest-risk and most complex cases.

NSBEP is committed to promoting these priorities to ensure that the government recognizes the critical role of psychologists in maintaining high standards of mental health care in Nova Scotia. Registrants who wish to support these priorities are welcome to share these messages within their professional and personal networks.

We appreciate your ongoing contributions to the profession and public protection.

Sincerely,



Conor Barker, Ph.D., R.Psych.
Chair, Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology



Erica Baker, Ph.D., R.Psych.
Chair, Entry-to-Practice Committee