



General Considerations on the Regulation of Counsellors across Canada

Current as of November 2018

A) Statutory regulation

The landscape regarding counselling is rapidly evolving. Currently, the only provinces in Canada where counselling and/or psychotherapy are regulated (or are being regulated) are Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. There is however a great deal of activity ongoing in other provinces. CCPA will continue to update this section of our website as the status of regulation changes in each province

In many, if not all provinces, practitioners who provide counselling services may also be registrants of an existing health, social service or education profession; e.g. psychologists, registered or psychiatric nurses, clinical social workers, or school counsellors.

B) Voluntary regulation

In some provinces, only a few persons who advertise that they are providing counselling services are not regulated through an existing college; in other provinces, there are many persons who provide counselling but are not regulated, except possibly through voluntary self-regulation.

A Project Working Group funded by HRSDC established a [National Definition and Scope of Practice](#) for counselling and psychotherapy in 2011. This definition and scope of practice were developed for those provinces seeking regulation. There is no requirement to use them.

Counsellors refer to themselves by a number of titles or provide services to the public in different of forums, ranging from addictions through to pastoral counselling. Some counsellors focus on specific populations (e.g. youth, elderly, couples, families), while others focus on specific types of counselling therapies (e.g. art therapy, music therapy, psychotherapy or marriage and family therapy).

Therefore, it is not surprising that there is no available or reliable data on the total number of persons who provide counselling to the public. Based on projections from those provinces that have some data, a rough estimate is that there are about 40,000 persons across Canada who provide “health” counselling (i.e. counselling that is directed at mental health and personal



growth). Persons who provide family mediation (“family mediators”) are usually also members of another professional body, such as law, social working, psychology, etc.

The most common entry standard for being registered a counsellor (regulated or non-regulated) is a master’s degree in counselling or a related field.

The Canadian Free Trade Agreement requires that a college’s entry standards be competency-based so that, regardless of what academic standard it may impose, the college must be able to prove that that requirement relates principally to competence.

Most professional associations have bylaws in place that allow them to investigate and resolve public complaints against their members.

Some provinces such as Quebec, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Alberta and British Columbia have an umbrella health professions governance statute that could be used as a framework for having counselling regulated. For the other provinces/territories, it would appear that a dedicated and separate counselling regulation statute would have to be approved by the Legislature.

Some of the national associations provide a basis to regulate members of their provincial bodies by way of occupational titles granted under the federal Trade-Mark Act; e.g. the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association and the Canadian Association for Music Therapy. However, this is a limited form of title protection that still relies on member cooperation and goodwill to succeed.

In general terms, the major issues that are holding back the regulation of counselling in any jurisdiction appear to be:

- (a) the need to prove a case for regulation by a thorough risks of harm analysis, and by that analysis - to define the most appropriate model for regulation;
- (b) the need to define what the competencies (e.g. education/training and experience) should be for entry into the profession.