



THE ASSOCIATION OF
COUNSELLING THERAPY
OF ALBERTA

Protecting the Public, Together

ACTA's Guiding Principles for Regulation with the Government's New Direction

SAME MANDATE, NEW DIRECTION

ACTA's mandate to establish regulation of the counselling profession in Alberta has not changed. As such, ACTA will be a collaborative partner in the new direction set out by the Government for regulation.

For the last six years, ACTA has worked at the behest of the Government and legislation to regulate Counselling Therapists, addiction counsellors, and child and youth care counsellors under the College of Counselling Therapy of Alberta (CCTA).

The Government announced on March 1, 2024, its plan to move forward with regulating the counselling profession within an existing regulatory college, the College of Alberta Psychologists, rather than moving forward to establish a separate College (CCTA). As part of this plan, in spring 2024, a legislative amendment will be put forward and if passed, would repeal Section 29 of the *Mental Health Services Protection Act*. ACTA recommends the legislation not be repealed until new legislation to regulate counselling professionals is ready to be enforced; nevertheless, it is ultimately the Government's decision.

ACTA supports the direction to regulate counsellors and acknowledges the Government's preference to have newly regulated professions regulated within existing colleges in the *HPA*. While this direction adds significant delay to regulation compared to simply proclaiming the legislation and approving the draft regulation, it is a viable path forward that ACTA will support in the interest of finally regulating the profession in the public interest and building off the work that has already been done. Both professions could also benefit from regulatory synergies, and the increased membership could provide more resources for the expanded college.

SELF-REGULATION AND CO-REGULATION

The profession to be regulated must be involved in a partnership with Alberta Health and the future regulator.

ACTA aligns with the intent and framework of self-regulation in the HPA, which is that a profession's standards are developed and executed through its regulatory body in collaboration with *the profession* and Government to protect the public, mitigate workforce disruption, and maintain labour mobility by being consistent with national standards.

To be clear, it is important to know that this change in direction does not mean that the profession of Psychologists defines the profession of Counselling Therapy and vice versa. They are distinct and separate healthcare professions. It is the role of the profession of Counselling Therapy in collaboration with the college and government to develop such matters as the Counselling Therapy standards, scope of practice, competencies, education and governance to competently and safely practice in the public's best interest. Such processes will be established and maintained for each profession.

Counselling Therapists and Psychologists are distinct professions that are equal but different, with overlapping scopes of practice. An expanded college commits to ensuring all new regulated members have the same rights and duties as the existing regulated members of the college. The professions would maintain the integrity of co-regulation in that the profession and public are equally represented to complete the elements of regulation established under the HPA.

The details of how this will work have yet to be defined, and we look forward to working on this together with CAP and Alberta Health.

FOUNDATIONAL WORK-TO-DATE

The work completed to date establishes the foundation for regulating the counselling profession.

The work was completed in accordance with the HPA's processes, guided by Alberta Health and Canadian National Standards for Labour Mobility. ACTA worked in partnership with the profession (all eleven counselling associations in Alberta), First Nations, and the regulatory colleges that regulate the counselling profession in five different provinces, ensuring congruence with national standards and labour mobility.

This work has met the regulatory standard through Alberta Health's completed widespread consultation, which included feedback from Alberta's regulatory health professions colleges and is ready to be used in the next steps. This includes the profession's standards of practice, code of ethics, competency framework, scope of practice, and draft regulations. We anticipate that building on the work already done by ACTA will expedite this process in the public interest.

WORKFORCE STABILITY AND GRANDPARENTING

Regulating the profession should increase public safety while ensuring the current competent workforce is not disrupted or reduced.

It has been a customary practice when a new regulatory college is established that the education standards of a newly regulated profession are not to be applied retroactively to the current workforce. This would restrict professionals who have acquired competence in the profession through diverse education, training, and supervision in a pre-regulated context from continuing to serve the public. It is important that the public continue to receive and access these counselling services with the protections provided under the *HPA*. Regulatory colleges also enhance public protection by enforcing continued competency programs, managing complaints, restricting practice, and enforcing discipline, including loss of licensure when needed.

At the direction of Alberta Health and in line with the *HPA*, ACTA began the grandparenting process to identify and port those already competently working in the counselling profession in Alberta to prevent workforce disruption. Despite the new direction of the Government, ACTA believes it is in the public interest to honour and maintain the grandparenting route to ensure the competent workforce serving Albertans' mental health needs is not reduced.

For those currently entering the field, the college would uphold the education, training, and supervision requirements that are commonly accepted for the profession today and which were identified in the regulations as a master's degree in counselling therapy approved by the council. The grandparenting process is intended to be time-limited. As with all professions that become regulated, over time, there will be less diversity in how competency for Counselling Therapy is obtained in Alberta.

WHAT IS A COUNSELLING THERAPIST?

In their practice, counselling therapists do one or more of the following: (a) within a counselling relationship, assess, guide, support and treat individuals or groups of individuals to enhance, maintain and promote health and wellness; (b) engage in education with respect to the practice of counselling therapy; (c) engage in research related to the practice of counselling therapy; (d) provide restricted activities authorized by the regulations (*Mental Health Services Protection Act*, December 11, 2018).