

# Standards of Practice for Clinical Specialists



## Table of Contents

<b>LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>DECOLONIZATION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>REPARATIONS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Context of Clinical Social Work Practice .....	7
Core Concepts and Definitions.....	8
Contextual Terms .....	9
<b>HOW TO USE THESE STANDARDS .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>VALUES.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>VALUE 1: RESPECTING THE DIGNITY AND WORTH OF ALL PEOPLE .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Guiding Principle 1.1:</b> Clinical specialists safeguard the self-determination and autonomy of all individuals, upholding every service user's right to participate in decision making based on informed consent, factoring in the individual's capacity and the rights of others. ....	12
<b>Guiding Principle 1.2:</b> Clinical specialists embed the concept of healing into their practice, underscoring the importance of choice and self-determination within the confines of legal obligations and the duty of care. ....	12
<b>VALUE 2: PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Guiding Principle 2.1:</b> Clinical specialists address social justice issues that affect people with mental health and well-being, addiction, trauma, grief/loss/illness, and crisis issues. ....	14
<b>Guiding Principle 2.2:</b> Clinical specialists provide culturally responsive services and are aware of intersectionality factors that impact service users from diverse cultures. ....	14
<b>Guiding Principle 2.3:</b> Clinical specialists translate knowledge into effective practice, with a conscious commitment to social action. ....	15
<b>Guiding Principle 2.4:</b> Clinical specialists actively advocate with and for service users in matters concerning their rights and access to necessary resources. ....	15
<b>VALUE 4: VALUING HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Guiding Principle 4.1:</b> Clinical specialists recognize the paramount importance of human relationships and are guided by theories of human behaviour that contextualize individuals within their social environments, ensuring the well-being of others is central to all practice areas. ....	17
<b>Guiding Principle 4.2:</b> Clinical specialists strive to cultivate a working relationship with service users founded on respect and recognition of each service user's uniqueness. Clinical specialists ensure that service to others is prioritized over self-interest. ....	18
<b>VALUE 5: PRESERVING INTEGRITY IN PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Guiding Principle 5.1:</b> Clinical specialists cultivate trust through honesty, reliability, impartiality, and diligence within their professional endeavours. ....	19
<b>Guiding Principle 5.2:</b> Clinical specialists, when acting in a management or supervisory role, deliver and oversee clinical social work services with integrity, respect, and accountability. ....	19

<b>Guiding Principle 5.3:</b> Clinical specialists collaborate with others and contribute their knowledge, skills and values to clinical services and programs when providing services in other settings beyond their private practice. ....	20
<b>Guiding Principle 5.4:</b> Clinical specialists deliver holistic services that adeptly addresses mental health and wellbeing, addiction, trauma, grief, loss, illness, and crisis situations through comprehensive service provision. ....	20
<b>VALUE 6: MAINTAINING PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Guiding Principle 6.1:</b> Clinical specialists uphold the interests of service users and the public by safeguarding the trust and confidence inherent in the confidential relationship with service providers. ....	23
<b>Guiding Principle 6.2:</b> Clinical specialists honour the right of service users to determine how their information is shared and seek informed consent before sharing information with others. ....	23
<b>Guiding Principle 6.3:</b> Clinical specialists are meticulous in maintaining records of professional interventions and opinions, following the NSCSW Social Work Documentation Guidelines. ....	24
<b>VALUE 7: PROVIDING COMPETENT CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PROFESSIONAL SERVICES .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Guiding Principle 7.1:</b> Clinical specialists ensure that interventions are informed by the situational context of the individual receiving service and are centered on the needs of service users. ....	26
<b>Guiding Principle 7.2:</b> Clinical specialists are committed to a holistic and integrated approach to mental health and well-being, acknowledging the crucial role of a broad network of support. ....	26
<b>Guiding Principle 7.3:</b> Clinical specialists operate at the critical intersection of mental health and other social and human services, ensuring a holistic and integrated approach to care, and consideration of the structural social determinates of health. ....	27
<b>Guiding Principle 7.4:</b> Clinical specialists engage in ongoing learning and professional growth through continuing education, development, and reflective supervision. ....	28

## Land Acknowledgement

The NSCSW is in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq, whose inherent rights were recognized in the Peace and Friendship Treaties that were signed from 1725 to 1779. This series of treaties did not surrender Indigenous land, resources, or sovereignty to the British Empire, but instead established rules for an ongoing relationship between nations. The treaties were later reaffirmed by Canada in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and remain active to this day.

The NSCSW joins our members and our communities in the labour of reconciliation, and we are grateful to live and work together as treaty people in Mi'kma'ki

## Decolonization

The College affirms our gathering in Spirit, rooted deeply in the Treaty Rights of the Mi'kmaq in Mi'kma'ki and in the rich legacy of Mi'kmaq sacred knowledge, teachings, land-based traditions, language, and ceremonies. We stand in respect and recognition of Etuaptmumk, or Two-Eyed Seeing, which teaches us to integrate Indigenous and Western knowledge systems for a more balanced and meaningful understanding of the world.

With Land Back as both a call to action and a path to justice, we honour the inherent connection of the Mi'kmaq to their ancestral lands and strive to support the reclamation of stewardship over these sacred spaces. Our work is driven by a shared philosophy and consciousness, one that seeks to uplift and strengthen Mi'kmaq and Indigenous approaches to social work, while supporting their unique practices and worldviews.

We are committed to fostering trust and understanding with Mi'kmaq and Indigenous communities, as well as advancing education and awareness among all social workers. Our vision is rooted in justice, guided by a hope for building a new, more equitable framework for social work. Through this, we recognize the need for a new Code of Ethics—one that is resilient, adaptable, and inclusive of the principles of Indigenous knowledge systems.

Together, we pledge to uphold these values as we continue to evolve, ensuring that our collective philosophy remains a living, breathing commitment to justice, empowerment, and respect for the Mi'kmaq and all Indigenous peoples.

## Reparations

The College firmly recognizes that reparations are both a moral and material obligation to atone the deep-rooted history of anti-Black racism within Nova Scotia and the broader Canadian context, which has led to human rights violations and crimes committed too people of African Descent. We are unequivocally committed to engaging with our members in proactive efforts toward reparations for the historical enslavement of peoples of African descent and addressing the systemic disenfranchisement faced by African Nova Scotian communities.

Reparations transcend mere monetary redress. They embody a comprehensive approach to healing and justice, addressing crucial areas of injury through five forms of reparation: <sup>1</sup>

1. **Restitution:** We advocate for measures that aim to restore lost rights and statuses, reversing the injuries endured by African Nova Scotians and their ancestors.
2. **Compensation:** We support economic recompense to address damages experienced due to employment discrimination, healthcare disparities, and other quantifiable losses.
3. **Rehabilitation:** Beyond financial compensation, we champion the restoration of land and the acknowledgment of stolen intellectual properties, and providing services that foster healing and recovery.
4. **Satisfaction:** Our commitment includes the cessation of harms through public apologies, commemorations, and tributes to the victims and survivors of historical injustices, recognizing their enduring impact on families and communities.
5. **Guarantees of Non-repetition:** We pledge to work towards preventing future human rights violations by adherence to ethical codes of conduct and promoting awareness and education on these issues.

The history of people of African descent in Nova Scotia is marked by resilience, contribution, and profound influence on the province's social fabric. From the Black Loyalists and the Maroons to the Southern American Black Refugees, the legacies of these communities have indelibly shaped Nova Scotia's cultural landscape. Their stories, marked by perseverance in the face of adversity, are central to our shared history and necessitate both recognition and restitution.

In committing to these principles of reparations, the College aims to honor the significant contributions of African Nova Scotians and ensure a future where equity, justice, and respect for human rights are not just ideals but realities for all. We stand dedicated to transforming this commitment into tangible actions that contribute to the healing, empowerment, and upliftment of African Nova Scotian communities, laying the groundwork for a more equitable and inclusive society.

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "Reparations", <https://www.ohchr.org/en/transitional-justice/reparations>

## Introduction

These standards set out by the Nova Scotia College of Social Workers (NSCSW) are intended to be used in conjunction with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (2025). The Code of Ethics and Standards (2025) and these establish the minimum expectations for clinical specialists. Together, these standards serve as a foundational framework guiding clinical specialists in their practice, ensuring that clinical specialists adhere to the ethical and professional benchmarks set forth by the NSCSW. By integrating these standards with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, clinical specialists are equipped to provide ethical and effective services, fostering a positive effect on individual and community well-being through their dedicated efforts in private practice environments.

Clinical specialists are Registered Social Workers who have been approved by the Board of Examiners to deliver clinical social work services in a private setting. The Board of Examiners defines the scope of the clinical social work specialization as social work in a private practice that:

- a. provides mental health and well-being, addiction, trauma, grief/loss/illness, and crisis assessments and services that situate the individual within their social context inclusive of family, political, economic and cultural factors with a focus on the structural social determinants of health;
- b. utilizes therapy and interventions that are grounded in principles of evidence-informed, bio-psycho-social-spiritual approaches that are culturally relevant to the social contexts of service users to achieve their mental health and well-being, addiction, trauma, grief/loss/illness, and crisis intervention goals;
- c. engages directly with individuals, couples, families, and groups focused on complex issues affecting individual and family functioning and their relationships including, but not limited to, mental health, addiction, trauma, grief/loss/illness, and crisis; and
- d. informed by the broader concepts intrinsic to social work including human rights and social justice.

### *Context of Clinical Social Work Practice*

Clinical specialists in Nova Scotia provide a range of service in a private setting to support service users experiencing mental health and addictions issues, grief and loss, and recovery from traumatic experiences. It is essential to recognize the significant historical role social work has played in shaping clinical services, particularly for economically and racially marginalized communities. These standards underscore the necessity of addressing oppressive systems and practices, emphasizing restorative justice, reconciliation, and the elimination of intersectional biases. The NSCSW is committed to fostering anti-oppressive, trauma-informed, anti-colonial, and anti-racist practices within the field. This commitment is crucial for confronting the profession's colonial and racist legacies and advocating for a more equitable, inclusive, and compassionate approach to social work in Nova Scotia.

The NSCSW stands firm on the principles of equality, equity, and humanitarianism, striving to create a society that champions justice in every aspect of life. Clinical specialists face ethical challenges across various contexts and continually adapt their practice to effectively meet both individual and collective needs. Empowering marginalized groups and advocating for systemic

changes to uphold human rights both locally and internationally remain central goals of the profession and clinical specialists.

The process of decolonizing social work, involving understanding the impact of colonialism, engaging in self-reflective practice, addressing intersecting oppressions, and working towards their eradication, is integral to the role of clinical specialists. These professionals make significant and meaningful contributions to the profession's commitment to learning from history, fostering partnerships, and ensuring the safety and well-being of communities. The NSCSW values its members' efforts in establishing and adhering to ethical and professional standards for social work practice, ensuring that clinical specialists contribute meaningfully to healing and growth within this region.

### *Core Concepts and Definitions*

**Scope of Clinical Social Work Specialization:** Clinical Specialists specialize in providing services that address mental health, addiction, trauma, grief, illness, and crisis assessments. These services place individuals within their broader social contexts, including family, social, economic, and cultural backgrounds, with an emphasis on understanding how these factors affect mental health and well-being.

**Purpose of Practice:** The goal is to support healing, improve the well-being of individuals and families, foster self-determination, and promote social justice principles.

**Practice Context:** Clinical specialists engage at the juncture of an individual's personal experience and their environment. This includes starting with the individual and expanding out to include their family, social networks, community, and society at large.

**Roles and Collaboration:** Social workers, whether working independently or as part of a team, collaborate with relevant professionals and people impacting the individual's well-being.

**Social Context:** Clinical specialists examine how individual experiences are both influenced by and influence their social environment, affecting aspects like mental health, addiction, and trauma. It involves understanding internal and external factors of vulnerability and resilience, family dynamics, support networks, cultural influences, socioeconomic status, and the impact of broader social issues such as income, employment, and housing on individuals and families.

**Social Consequences:** Social work addresses how issues related to mental health, addiction, trauma, grief, and crisis impact self-perception, life opportunities, family well-being, economic security, employment, and housing. It also considers the potential links between mental health and overall health.

**Private Practice:** Defined in Section 2(j) of the Social Workers Act, "private practice" refers to social work services provided by self-employed individuals, characterized by personal liability, independent clinical and administrative oversight, and direct billing for services rendered.

**Health:** The World Health Organization's constitution defines health as more than the absence of disease, calling it a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.<sup>2</sup> Mental health is essential for cognitive and emotional functions, interpersonal relationships, earning capabilities, and overall life enjoyment, thereby necessitating global prioritization for its promotion, protection, and restoration.

**Factors Affecting Mental Health:** Mental health can be adversely affected by a myriad of factors, including psychological, personality, and biological influences, socio-economic challenges such as low income and limited education, environmental stresses like social changes and discrimination, and personal lifestyle and physical health issues. In addressing broader social justice concerns, social workers play a critical role in enhancing conditions related to mental health.

### *Contextual Terms*

The Standards of Practice apply the following terms.

**“All people”** and **“people”** include all individuals, families, groups, and communities, irrespective of their participation in social work services.

The term **“service users”** includes individuals (service users, patients, residents, etc.), parents and substitute decision-makers, families, groups, communities, and populations who access or receive social work services.

The term **“family”** is also expanded beyond the traditional definition of family (e.g., spouses, parents, siblings, other relatives, etc.) to include any person(s) who plays a significant role in an individual's life which may include a person(s) not legally related to the individual.

---

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, “Constitution of the World Health Organization (Preamble),” in *Constitution of the World Health Organization*, adopted 1946, entered into force 7 April 1948, <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>.

## How to Use These Standards

The Standards of Practice for Clinical Specialists serve multiple critical roles, from delineating professional responsibilities to ensuring public safety and fostering ongoing professional growth. These standards articulate the expected ethical behaviours, abilities, knowledge, skills, and practices necessary for clinical specialists to provide safe, competent care. They function as the benchmark for evaluating a clinical specialist's performance, with key objectives including:

- **Setting Professional Expectations:** They provide a foundation for social workers to develop, manage, evaluate, and enhance their practice responsibly.
- **Protecting the Public:** By mandating competent practice, they safeguard the public and specifically those receiving social work services.
- **Supporting Professional Development:** They offer a framework for ongoing learning and professional growth within the social work field.
- **Clarifying Social Work Practice:** By embodying the profession's values, ethics, knowledge, and skills, they support others—professionals, employees, service users, and the general public—to understand the objectives and methods of social work practice in Nova Scotia.
- **Enhancing the Profession's Value:** They bolster the profession's credibility and effectiveness in advocating for necessary social changes.

Ethical decision-making within this framework requires thoughtful consideration of various perspectives, including those of service users, the working environment, and societal narratives. This process involves introspection into one's values, emotions, and positioning, as well as consultation to navigate ethical challenges and personal influences on decision-making.

NSCSW encourages its members to engage with the *Standards of Practice for Clinical Specialists* and accompanying guidelines for ethical considerations or dilemmas. Resources like the Ethical Decision-Making Tool on the NSCSW website, alongside seeking supervision and NSCSW consultation, are recommended to support members in resolving ethical concerns effectively.

## Values

Social work practiced in any field is grounded in seven core values which give rise to general and specific ethical responsibilities as outlined in the NSCSW Code of Ethics (2025). The values are:

1. Respecting the Dignity and Worth of All People
2. Promoting Social Justice
3. Pursuing Truth and Reconciliation
4. Valuing Human Relationships
5. Preserving Integrity in Professional Practice
6. Maintaining Privacy and Confidentiality
7. Providing Competent Professional Services

## Value 1: Respecting the Dignity and Worth of All People

***Guiding Principle 1.1:** Clinical specialists safeguard the self-determination and autonomy of all individuals, upholding every service user's right to participate in decision making based on informed consent, factoring in the individual's capacity and the rights of others.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists establish professional relationships with service users facing challenges related to mental health, addiction, trauma, grief/loss/illness, and crisis situations. They also encourage, where appropriate, the involvement of families in the care process.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall uphold the dignity and worth of all service users by:

- 1.1.1. listening respectfully to service users, their families, and those close to them;
- 1.1.2. providing an emotionally supportive therapeutic relationship;
- 1.1.3. valuing the lived experiences of service users dealing with mental health, addiction, trauma, grief/loss/illness, and crisis issues, and acknowledging their impact;
- 1.1.4. being mindful of how age, cultural background, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender and gender expression might influence the therapeutic relationship;
- 1.1.5. working in partnership with service users and, where appropriate their families, ensuring a mutual approach in assessment and clinical intervention planning;
- 1.1.6. using inclusive language to bridge any gaps in experience, power, and personhood between the social worker and service users;
- 1.1.7. gathering and providing information in a way that respects service users' experiences, beliefs, and feelings;
- 1.1.8. welcoming and valuing feedback from service users and, where applicable, their families;
- 1.1.9. encouraging active participation in decision-making at all levels of interaction, emphasizing the importance of self-determination;
- 1.1.10. adapting approaches to meet the needs and comprehension levels of different age groups, including children, young people, adults, and older individuals;
- 1.1.11. acknowledging and accommodating the diverse experiences and perspectives of all members when working with families and groups.

***Guiding Principle 1.2:** Clinical specialists embed the concept of healing into their practice, underscoring the importance of choice and self-determination within the confines of legal obligations and the duty of care.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists are dedicated to fostering a healing-oriented approach including the principles of hope, dignity, self-determination, and responsibility in their practice. This involves supporting service users in navigating their healing journeys, empowering them to make choices and define their paths toward well-being while adhering to legal standards and ethical responsibilities.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall demonstrate a commitment to healing by:

- 1.2.1 supporting service users in taking control of their healing and well-being by helping them to articulate their goals and desires, regardless of their legal circumstances (such as voluntary or involuntary participation in treatment);
- 1.2.2. collaborating with service users to leverage their experiences, expertise, and strengths throughout all stages of engagement, paying close attention to those dealing with issues related to mental health and wellness, addictions, trauma, grief, loss, illness, and crisis.

In addition, in instances where involuntary service is necessary, clinical specialists shall:

- 1.2.3. advocate for the reduction of coercion, seclusion, and restraint, ensuring that the rights and dignity of service users are at the forefront of care decisions.

## Value 2: Promoting Social Justice

*Guiding Principle 2.1: Clinical specialists address social justice issues that affect people with mental health and well-being, addiction, trauma, grief/loss/illness, and crisis issues.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists play a crucial role in advocating for and addressing the broader social justice issues that impact the lives of service users. This involves taking proactive steps to ensure equitable access to resources, challenging stigma and discrimination, and promoting the inclusion of service users in decision-making processes.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall demonstrate a commitment to social justice by:

- 2.1.1. recognizing the complexity of human experience by incorporating a holistic bio-psycho-social-spiritual approach in assessments and interventions, moving beyond merely focusing on illness, diagnosis, and treatment;
- 2.1.2. actively challenging stigma and discrimination encountered in practice, fostering an environment of respect and dignity;
- 2.1.3. facilitating access to necessary treatment and support services, ensuring service users can avail themselves of the care they need;
- 2.1.4. promoting the rights of service users to participate in decision-making processes and have choices in the services they receive;
- 2.2.5. advocating for organizations to be equitable, accessible, and responsive to the needs and goals of service users experiencing mental health, addiction, trauma, grief/loss/illness, and crisis issues;
- 2.2.6. ensuring that all civil and human rights of service users are acknowledged and protected within the sphere of practice.

*Guiding Principle 2.2: Clinical specialists provide culturally responsive services and are aware of intersectionality factors that impact service users from diverse cultures.*

**Context for Practice Statement:** Clinical specialists are expected to have a deep understanding of how culture and race influence human behaviour and social dynamics and apply that knowledge to their practice. This involves continuous learning about different cultural perspectives on mental health, recognizing and challenging one's biases, and actively employing culturally responsive practices. The goal is to foster an environment where all service users feel understood, respected, and supported, thereby facilitating their empowerment and well-being.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall possess a comprehensive understanding of how mental illness and mental health are perceived within the cultural contexts of service users by:

- 2.2.1. assessing the degree to which service users relate with and accept the concepts of mental illness and mental health as understood in their own cultures and in different cultures;
- 2.2.2. assessing for potential conflicts between service users' cultural beliefs and practices related to mental health and those prevalent in Canadian mental health practices, including strategies for addressing and reconciling these disparities;

- 2.2.3 consulting with cultural interpreters or advisors (i.e., spiritual leaders, Elders, knowledge keepers, etc.) to assist with providing culturally responsive services when necessary;
- 2.2.4. providing culturally responsive services for supporting individuals effectively, which may involve collaboration with or referrals to specialized culturally-oriented mental health services.

*Guiding Principle 2.3: Clinical specialists translate knowledge into effective practice, with a conscious commitment to social action.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists are positioned to not only address personal and psychological needs but also to challenge the structural barriers that hinder equity and access to resources. This approach demands a critical engagement with the social, political, and cultural dimensions influencing mental health and well-being, and a commitment to social action that aligns with the profession's dedication to human rights.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall engage in activities of social action as demonstrated by:

- 2.3.1 examining the social, political, and cultural contexts necessitating social action;
- 2.3.2 acknowledging how these factors impact mental health and well-being;
- 2.3.3 actively participating in consultations with individuals and community groups, fostering a collaborative approach to identifying needs and planning interventions;
- 2.3.4 taking direct action to address specific issues that adversely affect mental health and well-being, leveraging professional skills and resources to enact change;
- 2.3.5 assisting and enhancing the advocacy and educational efforts of community groups aimed at countering stigma and discrimination against those with mental health issues;
- 2.3.6 facilitating connections between service users and advocacy groups to bolster opportunities for collective action, tailored to the expressed needs and interests of those served.

Depending on the needs of service users,

- 2.3.5 disseminating information about political and legal avenues through which social action can be pursued, ensuring individuals are informed of their rights and options.

*Guiding Principle 2.4: Clinical specialists actively advocate with and for service users in matters concerning their rights and access to necessary resources.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists understand the vital importance of standing alongside and speaking with those they serve, particularly in navigating systems that impact their rights and access to resources. This advocacy is rooted in a deep understanding of the social, economic, and political factors that affect individuals' lives. The process involves not only addressing immediate needs but also working toward systemic change to eliminate barriers and injustices.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall advocate with service users to access needed resources by:

- 2.4.1 establishing the need for advocacy by identifying specific rights or problems that require attention, based on a thorough assessment of the individual's situation;
- 2.4.2 investigating and presenting a range of possible actions to address the identified needs, supporting the individual in choosing the most suitable course of action;
- 2.4.3 ensuring that the intervention team's decision-making processes at all stages are respectful of, and inclusive of, service user needs and wishes and where appropriate, those of their family;
- 2.4.4 encouraging and facilitating self-advocacy by assisting with preparation, providing relevant resources, and offering feedback to enhance outcomes;
- 2.4.5 connecting individuals and their family members with appropriate supports and advocacy groups as valuable resources;
- 2.4.6 challenging organizations or service provision systems that are disempowering or discriminatory, and advocating for changes that support the empowerment and well-being of service users and, where appropriate, their families.
- 2.4.7 utilizing high-level communication skills and demonstrating courage to ensure that service users' best interests are effectively represented in all advocacy efforts;
- 2.4.8 assessing the effectiveness of advocacy actions and adjusting as needed to achieve the desired outcomes;
- 2.4.9 advocating within complex specialist contexts, such as within the forensic provisions of mental health legislation, ensuring that individuals' rights and needs are adequately represented and supported.

## Value 4: Valuing Human Relationships

***Guiding Principle 4.1:** Clinical specialists recognize the paramount importance of human relationships and are guided by theories of human behaviour that contextualize individuals within their social environments, ensuring the well-being of others is central to all practice areas.*

**Context for Practice Statement:** Clinical specialists understand that a comprehensive approach to care involves considering the full spectrum of a service user's life, including bio-psycho-social-spiritual elements. By situating the individual within their broader context, the Clinical specialist is better equipped to address the complex interplay of factors affecting the person's well-being. This holistic approach not only acknowledges service users' existing strengths and difficulties but also fosters a collaborative therapeutic relationship that is essential for effective practice. Through this relationship, clinical specialists can support service users in realizing change, overcoming challenges, and moving towards healing.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall commit to providing **holistic services** and consider the full spectrum of a service user's life by:

- 4.1.1 engaging in-depth with service users to understand their perspective on their difficulties and strengths, considering their physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and cultural needs;
- 4.1.2 pursuing additional assessments in distinct clinical and related areas as necessary, and acquiring extra training to ensure proficiency. Prior to conducting these assessments, clinicians must undertake a self-assessment to affirm their preparedness (refer to guidelines). These evaluations may encompass social work-related or interdisciplinary practices including outcome measurement, psychiatric disability assessment, vocational capability evaluation, consideration of age-specific issues, forensic evaluations, or the implementation of standardized assessment schedules that demand adept data analysis;
- 4.1.3 proactively identifying and evaluating indicators to mitigate potential harm to service users or others. This encompasses assessing risks related to self-harm, vulnerability to domestic violence, other safety concerns within the home and living environment such as child safety and evaluating the likelihood of the service user causing harm to others;
- 4.1.4 establishing or verifying the probable mental health condition(s) and analyzing the significance and priority of factors influencing service user's state. In situations lacking a formal diagnosis, employing frameworks like the DSM-5 to formulate a preliminary assessment and discussing significant factors impacting the service user's condition;
- 4.1.5 integrating theory and professional knowledge with collected data to construct a comprehensive narrative linking the service user's functional status with their identified strengths and challenges within their social context;
- 4.1.6 collaborating with service users to reach a shared agreement and understanding regarding the assessment findings to identify and apply suitable interventions as part of the intervention or service planning, incorporating measurable objectives agreed upon by both parties;
- 4.1.7 consistently revisiting the assessment findings and the intervention or service plan with the service user to maintain a concentrated focus on a mutual recognition of challenges and strengths, ensuring adaptive and responsive care throughout the service provision process.

When appropriate:

- 4.1.8 collating data from a diverse array of sources to form a nuanced understanding of the service user's situational challenges and assets;
- 4.1.9 conducting assessments of clinical functioning as an integral component of a broad-based assessment service, utilizing specific assessment tools to gain insight into particular facets of the service user's issues and strengths.

***Guiding Principle 4.2:** Clinical specialists strive to cultivate a working relationship with service users founded on respect and recognition of each service user's uniqueness. Clinical specialists ensure that service to others is prioritized over self-interest.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists are dedicated to establishing and maintaining therapeutic relationships that honour the individuality and dignity of each service user. Clinical specialists understand the significance of mutual respect and the reciprocal nature of therapeutic relationships. The commitment involves engaging in continuous learning, applying evidence-informed knowledge to therapy and interventions, and maintaining an ethical stance that places the well-being of service users at the forefront of all professional endeavours.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall establish and maintain therapeutic relationships by:

- 4.2.1 identifying and utilizing current research to support the selection and application of bio-psycho-social-spiritual therapeutic interventions;
- 4.2.2 engaging with service users to form a therapeutic relationship that is characterized by empathy, trust, and respect, recognizing this as the foundation for effective intervention;
- 4.2.3 establishing a clear agreement with service users that outlines the basis for the intervention, ensuring transparency and mutual understanding regarding the objectives and process of therapy;
- 4.2.4 providing comprehensive information to service users about the purpose, nature, possible risks, and anticipated outcomes of the proposed intervention, ensuring informed consent is obtained;
- 4.2.5 working within a framework that is supported by evidence-informed practice, adapting therapy and intervention plans according to the evolving needs and progress of service users;
- 4.2.6 continuously monitoring and evaluating interventions, involving the service user's family as appropriate and with the service user's consent, to assess effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.
- 4.2.7 engaging in ongoing formal and informal professional development opportunities, including advanced and specialized training in therapeutic interventions, to enhance skill sets and maintain best practices in clinical social work.

## Value 5: Preserving Integrity in Professional Practice

*Guiding Principle 5.1: Clinical specialists cultivate trust through honesty, reliability, impartiality, and diligence within their professional endeavours.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists are integral to both the therapeutic environment and organizational operations, requiring a balance of professionalism in service delivery and administrative roles. Their practice is rooted in a thorough understanding of their professional domain, strict adherence to ethical standards, and effective collaboration within a multidisciplinary team.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall efficiently manage their professional responsibilities by:

- 5.1.1 acquiring a comprehensive understanding of both professional and administrative duties associated with their practice;
- 5.1.2 gaining insight into the role of clinical social work within their organization(s) and effectively communicating this understanding to service users and colleagues, ensuring that promotional materials accurately reflect this comprehension;
- 5.1.3 refraining from offering services in specialized areas until they have conducted a self-assessment of their competencies in those fields, adhering to established guidelines;
- 5.1.4 demonstrating respect for, and collaborating with, other professional disciplines in the provision of services;
- 5.1.5 upholding NSCSW standards as well as agency or program criteria for record-keeping, data collection, and the responsible use of resources.

In situations when the clinical specialist is employed in an agency or organization:

- 5.1.6 acknowledging and adapting to the management structure of their agency or program, including understanding the lines of professional and administrative accountability;
- 5.1.7 following organizational or program protocols for the effective execution of administrative and professional tasks;
- 5.1.8 implementing effective management practices to ensure the delivery of quality clinical services.

*Guiding Principle 5.2: Clinical specialists, when acting in a management or supervisory role, deliver and oversee clinical social work services with integrity, respect, and accountability.*

**Context for Practice** Clinical specialists are dedicated to establishing and supervising organizational policies and procedures that ensure the delivery of services adheres to principles of respect, inclusion, and active participation of all service users. This commitment is foundational to fostering an inclusive environment where the dignity and worth of every service user and staff members are recognized and upheld.

**Standard of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall ensure that the delivery of services adheres to the principles of respect, inclusion, and active participation of all service users by:

- 5.2.1 developing, reviewing, and monitoring organizational policies and procedures to guarantee that services honour the principles of respect for and inclusion of all individuals and where appropriate, their families, who benefit from the agency's services;
- 5.2.2 creating both formal and informal frameworks to involve service users and, where suitable, their families, in the planning, execution, and evaluation of provided services;
- 5.2.3 cultivating professionally enriching relationships among all staff members within the practice, promoting a culture of mutual respect and collaboration;
- 5.2.4 fostering an atmosphere of understanding and collaboration among various disciplines involved in the organization, emphasizing the importance of respecting and appreciating the unique contributions and domains of each discipline;
- 5.2.5 implementing management practices that reflect social work values and philosophy, ensuring that these core beliefs are seamlessly integrated into the organizational structure of service provision;
- 5.2.6 managing and mentoring staff members in a manner that is respectful, compassionate, and aligned with social work values, encouraging an environment where ethical practice and professional growth are prioritized.

*Guiding Principle 5.3: Clinical specialists collaborate with others and contribute their knowledge, skills and values to clinical services and programs when providing services in other settings beyond their private practice.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists extend their services beyond their practice to encompass roles within service delivery units and multidisciplinary teams. This collaborative approach not only enriches the quality of care offered to service users but also fosters a professional environment where respect, inclusion, and active participation are paramount. Clinical specialists, by virtue of their training and professional ethos, play a pivotal role in bridging diverse expertise and perspectives, contributing significantly to the holistic wellbeing of those they serve.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall maintain respectful collaborations with other disciplines by:

- 5.3.1 deepening their understanding of the comprehensive scope of clinical social work, including the essential skills, knowledge, and ethical underpinnings vital for effective clinical service delivery;
- 5.3.2 clearly articulating the specific objectives, roles, and activities of clinical social work within their organization and in collaborative ventures with other disciplines or practitioners;
- 5.3.3 ensuring a well-rounded perspective in interdisciplinary settings by becoming acquainted with the foundational knowledge, values, and practice methodologies of other mental health disciplines in relation to clinical social work;
- 5.3.4 contributing to a culture of mutual respect and shared goals in the provision of services by supporting the initiatives and contributions of other mental health professionals.

*Guiding Principle 5.4: Clinical specialists deliver holistic services that adeptly addresses mental health and wellbeing, addiction, trauma, grief, loss, illness, and crisis situations through comprehensive service provision.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists are instrumental in integrating a wide array of services to tackle complex issues related to mental health, addiction, trauma, and other significant life challenges. By advocating for a broad understanding of the scope of clinical social work, these professionals emphasize the critical role this field plays in developing multifaceted approaches to care. This stance not only highlights the unique contributions of clinical social work but also fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, enriching the collective effort to support individuals in navigating their journeys toward healing and resilience.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall employ a versatile skill set that includes problem-solving, education, and conflict resolution by:

- 5.4.1 promoting an understanding of the scope of clinical social work services;
- 5.4.2 enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration with other disciplines, organizations, and professionals in private practice.

## Value 6: Maintaining Privacy and Confidentiality

***Guiding Principle 6.1:** Clinical specialists uphold the interests of service users and the public by safeguarding the trust and confidence inherent in the confidential relationship with service providers.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists are entrusted with sensitive information that is pivotal to the therapeutic relationship. Ensuring confidentiality is crucial not only to maintain the trust of those receiving services but also to uphold the integrity of the social work profession. This commitment extends to all forms of communication and record-keeping.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall uphold confidentiality and protect the privacy of service users by:

- 6.1.1 treating all information obtained in the course of the clinical relationship as confidential, and using it solely for professional purposes;
- 6.1.2. being diligent in ensuring that professional interventions and information regarding service users are documented impartially, accurately, and with consideration for the potential viewing of these records by the service user or disclosure during legal proceedings;
- 6.1.3. ensuring service users have reasonable access to their official social work records in compliance with the Personal Health Information Act (PHIA).

***Guiding Principle 6.2:** Clinical specialists honour the right of service users to determine how their information is shared and seek informed consent before sharing information with others.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists respect the autonomy of service users in deciding if, when, and how their information is shared with others. The ethical management of this information is paramount to preserving the integrity of the therapeutic relationship and the professionalism of clinical specialists.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall seek informed consent before sharing information with third parties by:

- 6.2.1 informing service users about confidentiality in the therapeutic relationship and privacy of their record;
- 6.2.2 informing service users of the nature of any requests from third parties to have access to the service user's record and limits of any disclosure;
- 6.2.3 seeking written consent by service users prior to releasing any information unless required by law or court order;
- 6.2.4 exercising caution to protect the confidentiality of others when giving service users access to records, which may include the redaction of third-party information from the record as necessary;
- 6.2.5 implementing suitable precautions to protect service user confidentiality in cases of the clinical specialist's termination of practice, incapacity, or death.

*Guiding Principle 6.3: Clinical specialists are meticulous in maintaining records of professional interventions and opinions, following the NSCSW Social Work Documentation Guidelines.<sup>3</sup>*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists are obligated to maintain documentation that accurately reflects the services provided. This involves systematic, clear, and comprehensive written or electronic recording practices that ensure the integrity and confidentiality of service user information while upholding professional standards and ethical responsibilities. Clinical specialists take precautions to ensure privacy and confidentiality in the provision of electronic clinical social work services.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall maintain accurate and comprehensive records of service user interactions by:

- 6.3.1. regularly documenting, within the service user's file, progress notes, reports, and summaries of service user interactions. These records must align with NSCSW guidelines, ensuring that documentation practices support both accountability and confidentiality;
- 6.3.2 ensuring that professional interventions and information regarding service users are documented impartially and accurately, recognizing that these records may be accessed by the service user or may need to be disclosed during legal proceedings.

---

<sup>3</sup> Nova Scotia College of Social Workers, *Social Work Documentation – NSCSW Guidelines* (December 2023), <https://nscsw.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/NSCSW-Documentation-Guidelines-2023.pdf>.



## Value 7: Providing Competent Culturally Responsive Professional Services

*Guiding Principle 7.1: Clinical specialists ensure that interventions are informed by the situational context of the individual receiving service and are centered on the needs of service users.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists recognize that understanding service users' situational context involves a comprehensive assessment of their environment, personal history, culture and spiritual practices, current challenges, and strengths. This holistic view facilitates the development of interventions or service plans that are not only relevant and effective but also respectful of the person's autonomy and preferences. Clinical specialists collaborate closely with service users, as well as their support network and other professionals involved in their care, to create cohesive and supportive frameworks aimed at achieving the best possible outcomes for the person.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall provide cohesive, supportive and culturally responsive interventions that are informed by the situational context by:

- 7.1.1 conducting a comprehensive assessment of each service user's situation, consulting with others as required, and ensuring that service users' consent and preferences guide these consultations;
- 7.1.2 developing comprehensive interventions or service plans that addresses both short-term and long-term goals, identifying services and supports that facilitate the achievement of these goals, ensuring that service users' consent and preferences guide planning;
- 7.1.3 implementing interventions or service plans, ensuring that they are carried out effectively and in accordance with the agreed-upon objectives.

Where appropriate,

- 7.1.4 consulting with service users' family, support team members, and other service providers to enhance the implementation of service plans.

*Guiding Principle 7.2: Clinical specialists are committed to a holistic and integrated approach to mental health and well-being, acknowledging the crucial role of a broad network of support.*

**Context for Practice:** Clinical specialists understand that the challenges faced by services users with mental health issues cannot be addressed in isolation. Their well-being is intricately linked to various factors including stable housing, financial security, meaningful employment, and reliable healthcare services. Clinical specialists strive to extend their influence beyond the boundaries of traditional mental health services, reaching out to a diverse network of sectors and services within the community.

**Standard of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall maintain an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach to services by:

- 7.2.1 collaborating with other professionals across all sectors relevant to the individual's mental health and well-being, including but not limited to housing, income security, employment, and healthcare practitioners;
- 7.2.2 developing and maintaining a working knowledge of relevant services within the community, keeping abreast of service offerings, and maintaining both formal and informal connections with these sectors;
- 7.2.3 proactively providing information about the clinical specialist's organization to other service entities and encouraging effective liaison between the organization and a wide range of community services;
- 7.2.4 actively supporting and enhancing communication networks and cooperation among all stakeholders of services in the community that are pertinent to individuals with mental health needs and their families. This includes facilitating communication pathways that allow for seamless coordination and collaboration among services;
- 7.2.5 participating in forums, meetings, or workshops that aim to foster a collective approach to addressing the needs of those with mental health issues and their support networks.

***Guiding Principle 7.3:** Clinical specialists operate at the critical intersection of mental health and other social and human services, ensuring a holistic and integrated approach to care, and consideration of the structural social determinates of health.*

**Context for Practice:** The practice of clinical social work, at the interface of mental health and other social and human services, requires a deep understanding of how various systems interact and impact the well-being of service users. Clinical specialists recognize that mental health cannot be viewed in isolation but is deeply influenced by a range of social and environmental factors. In this context, practitioners are tasked with navigating complex service landscapes, advocating for the integration of services, and ensuring that service users with mental health issues receive the support they need to address not only their mental health but also the broader challenges they face. This approach demands continuous learning, flexibility, and a commitment to cross-sectoral collaboration.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall integrate holistic and integrated approaches to care and consider the structural social determinate of health by:

- 7.3.1 facilitating the integration of care and support for service users with mental health issues;
- 7.3.2 supporting service users to have a comprehensive understanding of their situation through analysis and discussion of the intricate relationship between their mental health and related social and human service issues;
- 7.3.3 offering consultation and liaison services to other professionals across various sectors, emphasizing the significance of mental health considerations in their practices and service delivery;
- 7.3.4 informing and educating service providers and policy-makers in social and human services about the specific needs of people with mental health issues, advocating for appropriate access and accommodations within these services;
- 7.3.5 advocating for and promoting an inclusive approach to service provision;
- 7.3.6 collaborating with others to address and resolve problems encountered by service users when accessing necessary services, working with both service users and other professionals to overcome barriers;

- 7.3.7 developing and implementing policies and protocols that facilitate effective service delivery at the intersection of mental health and other social and human services, aiming to streamline access and improve outcomes for those in need.

*Guiding Principle 7.4: Clinical specialists engage in ongoing learning and professional growth through continuing education, development, and reflective supervision.*

**Context for Practice:** A commitment to ongoing learning and reflective practice ensures that clinical specialists remain at the forefront of changing practices in care, providing the most effective and informed care to those they serve. This necessitates an environment where professionals are encouraged to reflect critically on their practice, engage with current research, and actively seek opportunities for growth. Through this process, clinical specialists can identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement, contributing to a cycle of lifelong learning and enhanced service delivery.

**Standards of Practice:** Clinical specialists shall demonstrate a commitment to continuous learning by:

- 7.4.1 adopting a critical reflective stance towards clinical social work practice, aimed at maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of their knowledge and skills;
- 7.4.2 identifying personal strengths in skill development and knowledge acquisition, and recognizing and building upon these assets for enhanced practice;
- 7.4.3 recognizing areas for personal growth in knowledge and skills, and setting goals for ongoing professional development;
- 7.4.4 acknowledging and analyzing recurring problems and achievements within the services or programs provided, and using these insights to inform future practice;
- 7.4.5 engaging with research literature to explore areas of key professional activity, integrating evidence-informed practices into daily work;
- 7.4.6 sharing critical reflections on practice experiences within the context of professional supervision and through discussions with colleagues, fostering a culture of learning and improvement.