

Social Worker Professional Development: 2023 & 2024

NSCSW Quality Assurance Report



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Who we are

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: ¹

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.

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

About us

The Nova Scotia College of Social Workers (NSCSW) is the regulatory body for social workers in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to serve and protect Nova Scotians by effectively regulating the profession of social work.

We establish, maintain, and regulate standards of professional practice. Our role is to ensure that Nova Scotians receive the services of skilled and competent social workers who are knowledgeable, ethical, qualified, and accountable to the people who receive social work services. We provide responsive, accountable leadership to ensure the highest standards of social work for Nova Scotians.

The people of Nova Scotia are entitled to receive the highest calibre of care from their social workers. To ensure this, we provide membership services to support social workers in maintaining the highest standards of professional competency, enabling participation in a broader provincial social work community.

Social workers provide an essential service to support Nova Scotians in leading healthier, happier lives. The NSCSW engages with Nova Scotia's social work community in advocating for improvement to social policies, programs, and social justice. We engage with members, government, employers, community groups, and citizens to build a stronger social work community, and to advance the social work profession in Nova Scotia. We work in solidarity with Nova Scotians to advocate for policies that improve social conditions, challenge injustice and value diversity.

Our values

Our work is grounded in integrity and professionalism which calls on us to be:

Respectful

The NSCSW is respectful of the inherent dignity of every individual, and strives for cultural humility and social change.

Accessible

The NSCSW provides communication and services that are accessible province-wide for members, stakeholders, and the public.

Ethical

The NSCSW follows the established national code of ethics that adheres to the values of the social work profession.

Progressive

The NSCSW is proactive in reflecting the values of social work, and supports innovation through education, research, and transformative community engagement, for the sake of social justice.

Introduction

This report offers an in-depth analysis of the quality assurance measures applied to the NSCSW's professional development (PD) program in 2023 and 2024, building from the methods and prior results published in the [NSCSW 2022 Quality Assurance Report](#).

A primary component of our mandate is public protection and safety, which we uphold by ensuring that social workers are engaged in meaningful continuing education aimed at mitigating risk and enhancing safety to the public and social workers.

This commitment aligns with the NSCSW's [Code of Ethics & Standards of Practice](#), which stipulate that social workers must continually update and refine their professional knowledge, skills, and values to reflect the latest advancements and methodologies within the field of social work. Through rigorous adherence to these standards, we strive to guarantee that all social workers are equipped with the most current knowledge and best practices in the profession. This report

The purpose of quality assurance in regulation

The [Social Workers Act](#) provides the regulatory framework for the NSCSW to define policy, practices, and standards for social workers in Nova Scotia. The NSCSW [Regulations & Professional Development Standards](#) further define the responsibilities of members in sourcing, completing, and reporting on their annual PD.

The primary goal of PD is the safety of the public. As the social work profession is continuously evolving and adapting, ongoing PD enacts a professional commitment to lifelong learning, and allows social workers to develop and adhere to emerging and promising practices, supporting the provision and delivery of safe(R) social work practices.

In regulation, quality assurance (QA) serves as a cornerstone in maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of professional standards and competencies, and is a core component of the [Standards of Good Regulation](#) as outlined by the [Nova Scotia Regulated Health Professions Network](#). It is an essential mechanism that ensures the consistent delivery of high-quality services, which is particularly crucial in fields such as social work where the wellbeing of individuals and communities is at stake.

Quality assurance goes beyond mere compliance with established standards. It seeks to foster a culture of continuous improvement, encouraging professionals to constantly enhance their skills and knowledge. This is achieved through various means such as regular assessments, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms.

One of the key roles of quality assurance is promoting public trust and confidence. When professionals adhere to recognized standards and continually strive for excellence, it reassures the public about the quality and reliability of the services they receive. This trust is vital in building strong, supportive relationships between social workers and the communities they serve.

Furthermore, quality assurance safeguards the interests of service users. This involves ensuring that services are delivered ethically, effectively, and responsibly. It means holding professionals and systems

accountable for their actions and ensuring that any concerns or complaints are addressed appropriately. It entails safer practice for the most vulnerable members of society.

In essence, the purpose of quality assurance in regulation is twofold: it aims to support professionals in delivering the best possible services, while also protecting the rights and interests of those who rely on these services. By achieving this balance, quality assurance contributes significantly to the overall health and effectiveness of the profession.

Quality assurance methods

The NSCSW employs a comprehensive and systematic planning and a developmental evaluation approach to ensure the quality and impact of our PD activities and the compliance of members in meeting the PD standards set forth by the organization.

Oversight & governance

The NSCSW's Council's professional development committee is involved in the planning, delivery, evaluation, and sense-making of evaluation data for the PD program.

This includes the establishment and ongoing application of the of the PD policy and the PD principles:

- relevance to the field of social work
- collaboration
- focus on justice
- applicability to practice
- future-orientation
- fostering critical thinking and self-reflection
- sustainability

All PD activities offered by NSCSW must adhere to and uphold these principles. The quality assurance process, including the audit and evaluation, are guided by the [PD standards](#).

Randomized quality assurance process

Staff conducted a randomized QA process for the registry years of 2023 and 2024. In the previous QA process for 2022, 20 members were selected for a random audit. It was concluded a random audit of 20 members would limit the development of insights into the quality and impact of the PD program. The total number of member records pulled and audited was increased to 70 for each year. While this increase can provide more data and potentially more insights, it is still limited in providing generalizable insights to the wider population of NSCSW members.

Given that in 2023 there were 2,842 members, the audit of 2023 represents 2.5% of the total number of members. In 2024 there were 3,024 members, with this audit representing 2.3% of the total number of members. The number of members pulled for each audit were:

- Registered Social Workers (RSW): 30
- RSW-Clinical Specialists / Private Practitioners²: 10
- Associate Members (AM): 10
- Associate Members Retired (AM-R): 10

² The NSCSW introduced a new regulatory framework for the private practice of clinical social work in 2024. Most members who had been registered as private practitioners were transferred to the new RSW-Clinical Specialist member class at that time; any private practitioners whom the Board of Examiners hadn't approved for independent clinical practice became RSWs instead.

- Social Worker Candidates (SWC): 10

The selection of members for participation in this process was weighted to be representative of percentages of each member category.

All members registered with NSCSW in 2023 and 2024 were assigned a random number within their membership category. Those pulled for audit and evaluation were assigned a code based on their membership class, the year of the submission, and their number in their set: [Designation]-[year]-[number].

To maintain consistency across the data, only members who were in the same membership category and for the whole registry year were included in the sample. The Professional Development Consultant was responsible for reviewing and analyzing PD records. To mitigate bias, the Professional Development Consultant did not know the membership number or any identifying information about the members prior to the review and during the analysis of the data. Only the administrative staff were aware of which member was associated with which assigned code.

Audit criteria

Compliance

The PD standards outline the formal, informal, mandated categories and subcategories for the PD program at the NSCSW. The individual activities and overall submission of each member was reviewed for compliance with:

- **The required minimum and maximum hours:** Did the member include the minimum/maximum required number of hours per category and sub-category, as defined by the PD standards? Members were given a Y/N rating based on their activity submissions per category.
- **Alignment with the PD standards:** Did the member submit a description of the activity, reflection, and/or supplementary material demonstrating the activity was aligned with the PD standards, categories, and sub-categories? Members were given a Y/N rating based on their activity submissions per category and sub-category. Flexibility was provided for members who claimed activities that were not aligned strictly aligned with the standards, if their description of the activity and the reflection provided by the member indicated that the purpose of the category and subcategory was achieved.

Sources of the trainings & activities

The members' submissions were reviewed to determine where and/or who offered the activities. This was done through analyzing the submissions and supplemental documentation and determining the number of hours per member for each category. The categories were:

- **NSCSW:** Did the member attend or participate in an activity led by the College and/or did they review pre-recorded content on the NSCSW YouTube page?
- **CASW:** Did the member attend a CASW webinar or workshop and/or did they review pre-recorded content on the CASW webinar platform?
- **Other social worker regulators or associations:** Did the member partake in a training or activity organized and/or led by another social work association or regulatory college in Canada?
- **External:** Did the member participate in or attend a training or activity from an organization or individual through their work, academic studies, or their own professional development?

- **Personal:** Did the member volunteer, review published materials, participate in therapy or organized classes, or partake in a self-directed activity?
- **Unsure:** Is there a lack of identifying information where it was not possible to evaluate who or what organization offered the activity?

Overall quality of the submission

The members' submissions were given an overall rating of quality. The scoring matrix was:

- **4 = excellent:** greatly exceeds expectations, descriptions of activities are clear, supporting information is provided, it is easy to understand what the activity was and the impact on the member, reflections are insightful and demonstrate development or shifts in knowledge, values, and/or skills.
- **3 = good:** exceeds expectations, description of activities are clear, there is enough information provided to generally assess what the activity was, who offered it, and the impact on the member, reflections demonstrate some development or shifts in knowledge, values, and/or skills.
- **2 = satisfactory:** meets the basic criteria, minimum hours are achieved, submission is mostly aligned with the PD standards.
- **1 = needs improvement:** more could be added, lacking in supporting details, it is hard to assess who or what offered the activity and/or training and what the impact was on the member, reflections are not substantial enough and it is difficult to assess demonstration of knowledge, values, and/or skills, member likely needs individual intervention with guidance, support, and/or resubmission of their PD for the registry year.
- **0 = greatly lacking supporting details, reflections, and/or information:** member will be required to have individual intervention and must resubmit PD for the registry year.

Demonstration of development or shifts in knowledge, skills, and/or values:

Given that the NSCSW PD program is meant to support professional social workers in their ongoing development and learning towards safer and ethical social work practice, members' submissions were reviewed to identify if there were demonstrations of the development of:

- **Knowledge:** Did the member write in their reflection words or statements demonstrating gained insights, comprehension of new information, greater understanding, awareness, or other words or statements that indicate transfer or development of knowledge related to social work practice?
- **Skills:** Did the member write in their reflections that they can better apply, analyze, or other words or statements that indicate development of skills related to social work practice?
- **Values:** Did the member write in their reflections that they developed or experienced shifts in their worldview, assumptions, beliefs, and/or values related to the topic and social work practice?

Feedback surveys for NSCSW-led PD activities

In 2023 and 2024, online surveys were used as an evaluation tool after members completed PD activities organized by the College. The results of these surveys are included in the overall results in this report.

Focus groups on the PD program & activities

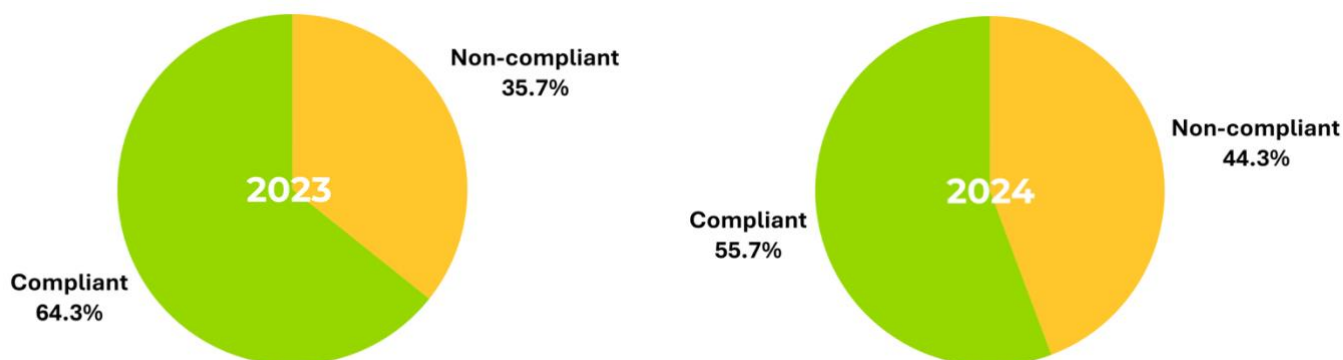
Eight members participated over two focus groups held in May of 2025. The focus groups were an opportunity for members to provide feedback on PD activities. The focus groups were facilitated by members of the PD committee along with the Professional Development Consultant.

Quality assurance audit results

The results of audit and evaluation conducted for the quality assurance process are broken out by year. Across both years there are patterns and themes emerging which will be further outlined in the subsequent sections of the report.

Audit

Overall compliance rates by year



Non-compliant members per membership class

Year	All audited members	RSW	AM	AM-R	SWC	PP/RSW-CS
2023	25	10	4	6	4	1
2024	31	10	4	2	8	7

Non-compliant members are required to resubmit and/or provide additional information. Members were deemed as non-compliant if their submission was incomplete, if there were multiple issues of misalignment with PD standards, and/or if they did not include enough information to be able to assess and evaluate the quality of their submission.

While the data from 2024's audit suggests that overall compliance has decreased since 2023, it is possible this was due to an administrative change in our registry portal.

In 2023 the registration renewal process required members to submit the exact number of hours required for their membership class and duration of their registration with NSCSW in that registry year. However, the database could not correctly calculate the required hours for any members who had switched status

during the year (e.g. for parental leave) and automatically defaulted to the requirements for their status at the moment of renewal; most affected members required manual intervention from NSCSW staff. This provided barriers and complications for many members, preventing them from timely completion of their renewal process, and it required significant administrative support.

In 2024, the registry database was changed to remove the automated tally of required PD hours, thus allowing members to proceed with their renewals regardless of the number of hours submitted. This change would rely on members' self-assessment of whether they had completed the requirements. Unfortunately, this exchanged one set of administrative burdens and delays for another, as a number of members accidentally submitted incomplete PD records. This required a significant amount of administrative support, as members who realized they had skipped an essential part of the process contacted NSCSW staff to regain access to the PD section of their registry portal. Some members proceeded through the rest of their registration renewal without realizing their error at all.

The variance between the years could be due to these changes. In 2024 there were three audited members who completed renewals, without submitting any PD activities.

Overall quality of the submissions

For the audited submissions for 2023, the lowest scores were within the Associate-Retired category, with more than half of the audited members in that category requiring intervention. The strongest category with the highest quality submissions were the Private Practitioners, with only one member in that category requiring intervention.

For the audited submissions for 2024, the lowest scores were within the Social Worker Candidate category, with 80% of those audited requiring intervention.

Given that the sample size for each year is small compared to the overall number of registered members it is difficult to gain insights into patterns specific to each membership class.

2023 quality scores



2024 quality scores



Quality averages

Year	All audited members	RSW	AM	AM-R	SWC	PP/RSW-CS
2023	2.1	2.0	2.2	1.2	2.2	2.9
2024	1.8	2.0	1.9	2.0	0.9	1.4

Compliance with standards

Mandated training & activities

Year	Sub-category	Social work ethics	Anti-racism & anti-discriminatory	Truth & reconciliation	Vicarious trauma & secondary stress	Social justice
2023	Hours	86% (60)	97% (68)	96% (67)	91% (64)	99% (69)
	Alignment with PD standards	73% (51)	81% (57)	77% (54)	77 % (54)	87% (61)
2024	Hours	76 % (54)	90% (63)	90% (63)	81% (57)	83% (58)
	Alignment with PD standards	67% (47)	83% (58)	80% (56)	71% (50)	80% (56)

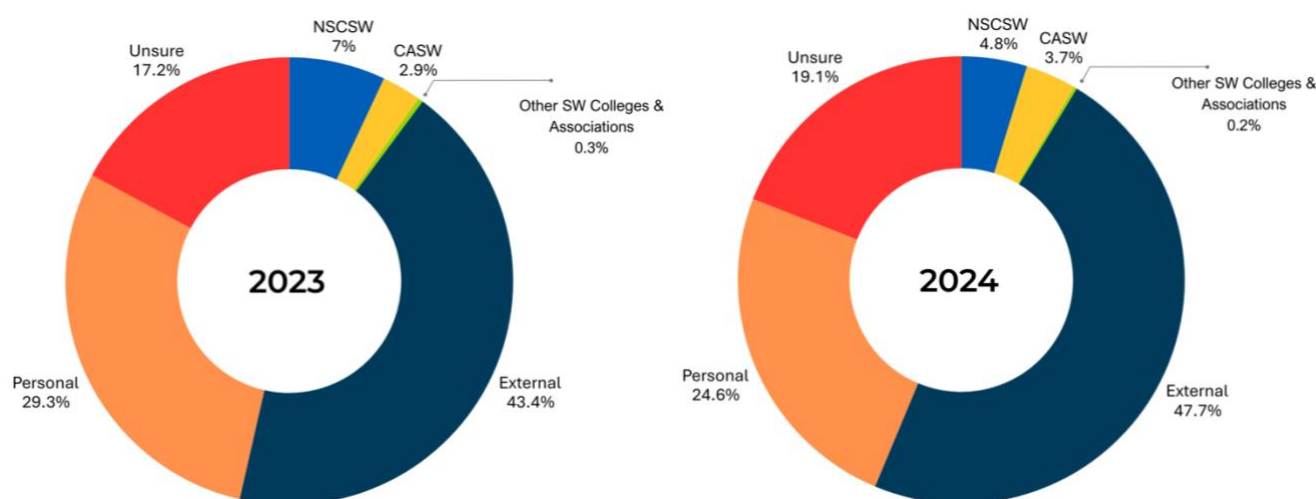
Overall, members were compliant with the mandated trainings and activities. Most members who were audited had the correct number of hours for each of the mandated topics. However, there was a challenge with having activities and/or trainings aligned with the PD standards, especially for PD related to social work ethics and the prevention of vicarious trauma & secondary stress.

Formal & Informal Learning

Year	Sub-category	Formal	Informal
2023	Hours	96% (65)	90% (63)
	Alignment with PD standards	76% (53)	59% (41)
2024	Hours	90 % (63)	90% (63)
	Alignment with PD standards	76% (53)	63% (44)

Overall, members were compliant with the minimum and maximum number of hours for the formal and informal categories and subcategories. However, there is a noted challenge with members activities not demonstrating alignment with the PD standards, especially with the informal subcategories of personal growth, self-care, and volunteering.

PD activity source



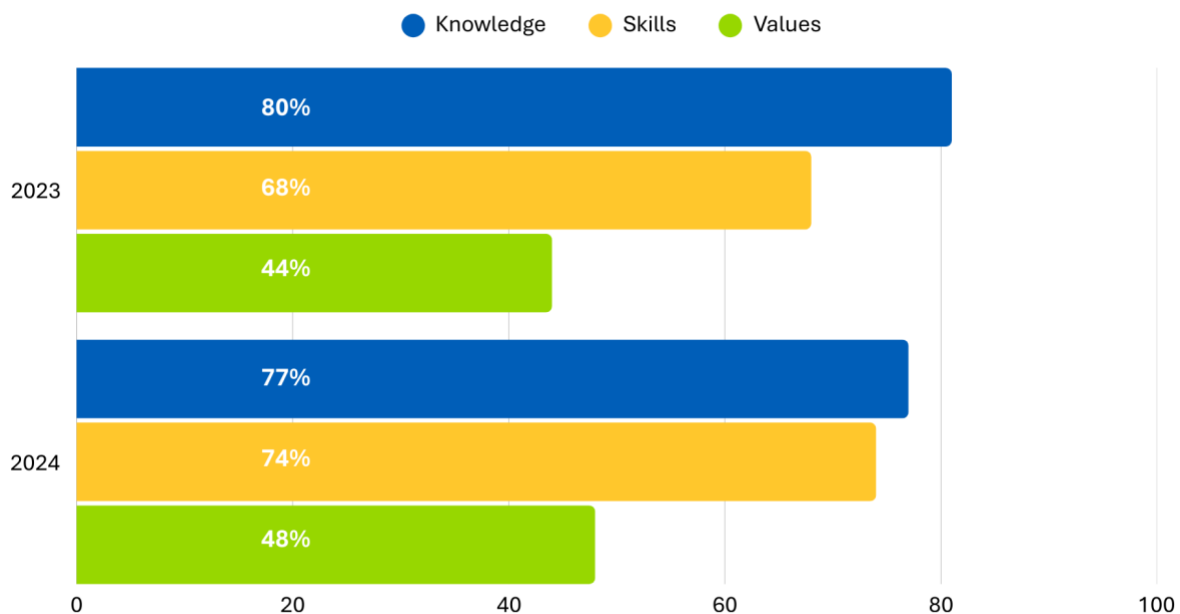
Most members audited in 2023 and 2024 participated in trainings and activities that were offered by external agencies, educators, and facilitators. Many members also participated in self-directed activities or activities where they themselves taught, supervised, or mentored.

Both audited years highlighted a need for members to include more information in their description of activities as there were many submitted activities where it was not possible to determine who offered the activities.

Learning reflections

PD activities are meant to support the learning, development, and growth of professional social workers. To demonstrate the impact of PD activities, members are instructed to answer the question “How did this professional development activity contribute to your learning/growth as professional social worker?”

In reviewing the member submissions, staff evaluated each activity submission for demonstration of knowledge, skills, and values.



Most members identified development or shifts in knowledge and skills because of their PD training and/or activities.

Shifts or development in values were less demonstrated in both years, potentially indicating that members either seek out trainings and/or activities that prioritize development of knowledge and skills. It is also possible that members are more focused on the development of knowledge and skills in their reflections, rather than shifts or development of worldviews, assumptions, beliefs, etc.

Survey evaluation results

In 2023 and 2024, online feedback surveys were provided to attendees of PD activities organized and led by NSCSW during the sessions and/or in follow-up email communications.

	2023	2024
<i>Number of survey responses</i>	211	218
<i>Learning experience overall</i>	8.2/10	8.1/10
<i>How likely they would recommend</i>	8.8/10	8.9/10

What did members like?

2023 responses

The survey responses highlight that attendees appreciated the events' knowledgeable and engaging presenters, relevant and timely topics, and well-organized structure. Key themes included the value of expert insights, practical applications, and opportunities for professional growth, particularly in areas like social justice, trauma-informed care, and cultural inclusivity. Participants valued the interactive elements, such as breakout rooms and discussions, as well as the clear, concise delivery of information. Many noted the events' accessibility, time management, and the ability to connect with peers. Overall, the events were seen as informative, thought-provoking, and impactful, with a strong emphasis on actionable learning and community engagement.

2024 responses

Attendees appreciated the knowledgeable and engaging presenters, the inclusion of diverse perspectives, and the use of first-person experiences to deepen understanding. Many valued the opportunity to connect with other social workers through breakout rooms and discussions, which fostered collaboration and shared learning. The events' focus on practical applications, cultural competence, and social justice resonated strongly, as did the well-organized format and accessibility. Participants also praised the variety of voices, including interdisciplinary and first-voice perspectives, and the thoughtful integration of resources, visuals, and interactive elements. Overall, the events were seen as insightful, empowering, and relevant to current social work practice.

What did members dislike?

2023 responses

Many participants felt the sessions were too short, rushed, or packed with information, leaving little time for reflection, discussion, or deeper exploration of topics. Some desired more interaction between presenters and participants, smaller or better-facilitated breakout groups, and a stronger focus on practical applications rather than introductory or surface-level content. Technical issues, such as unclear

audio, small visuals, and fast-paced slides, were also noted. A few attendees expressed concerns about the relevance of certain examples or narratives, while others wished for more in-depth discussions on specific topics, such as ethical dilemmas or advanced theories. Despite these critiques, many acknowledged the events' value and suggested improvements for future iterations.

2024 responses

Many participants felt the sessions were too short, rushed, or packed with information, leaving insufficient time for discussion, reflection, or deeper exploration of topics. Some noted that the introductions, including land acknowledgments, were lengthy and cut into the time for content. Others expressed a desire for more interactive elements, such as Q&A sessions, case studies, or breakout room discussions, with more time allocated to these activities. Technical issues, such as sound clarity and slide readability, were also mentioned as challenges. A few attendees found the format of multiple presenters or pre-recorded videos less engaging and preferred live, in-person interactions. Additionally, some felt the content was too high-level, academic, or narrowly focused, and suggested a need for more practical, actionable strategies. Overall, while the events were appreciated, participants highlighted areas for improvement in pacing, interactivity, and depth of content.

Recommendations for future activities

2023 responses

The responses highlight a strong interest in diverse and practical professional development opportunities. Many participants expressed a desire for more skill-based training, particularly in areas like trauma-informed care, mental health, anxiety, depression, grief, PTSD, and mindfulness. There is also significant interest in clinical practice topics, including psychodynamic models, CBT, family therapy, and emerging therapies like psychedelic-assisted treatments. Attendees requested more focus on social justice, truth and reconciliation, decolonization, allyship, and advocacy, as well as topics like climate change, ageism, and housing. Suggestions included offering more virtual and accessible events, flexible scheduling (e.g., weekends or shorter sessions), and interactive formats like small breakout groups. Other areas of interest included legal and ethical issues, neurodiversity, Indigenous knowledge, and supporting gender-diverse individuals. Overall, participants emphasized the importance of practical, inclusive, and accessible learning opportunities.

2024 responses

Many expressed a desire for more in-depth sessions on trauma-informed care, neurodivergence, personality disorders (especially narcissism), and substance use disorders, with a focus on practical strategies and case examples. Topics like climate change, social justice, ageism, and advocacy were also frequently mentioned, along with a call for more education on cultural competency, decolonization, and working with marginalized communities. Participants suggested exploring collaborative care models, interdisciplinary practices, and legal processes (e.g., family court, duty to report). There was interest in sessions on self-care, vicarious trauma, and mental fatigue, as well as workshops on specific populations, such as youth, seniors, and veterans. Many requested more interactive formats, such as guided discussions, panels with Q&A, and opportunities for peer connection. Other ideas included exploring

innovative therapies (e.g., psychedelic-assisted therapy), offering in-person events, and providing clearer instructions and resources in advance. Overall, participants emphasized the importance of practical, inclusive, and actionable learning opportunities tailored to diverse social work contexts.

Focus group results

The focus groups highlighted that PD activities and programs for social workers should be relevant, evidence-based, and justice-focused, incorporating first-voice content experts. Participants emphasized the importance of balancing virtual and in-person sessions, offering skills-based training to build clinical competency, and addressing existential and interdependent global issues. They also stressed the need for PD to foster interprofessional practice, support new and transferring social workers, and empower members to take on supervisory and mentorship roles. Flexibility in PD requirements and a focus on both "head smart" (theoretical) and "heart smart" (practical and emotional) learning were seen as essential.

Participants expressed excitement for PD activities that focus on neurodiversity-informed practices, practical skills for working with diverse populations, and non-dominant ways of knowing, such as Indigenous and Africentric perspectives. They valued opportunities for members to lead content, interact with peers, and engage in discussion-based activities. To support career goals, participants called for a balance of skills and theory-based training, supervision opportunities, and resources to help social workers advocate to their employers. They also suggested changes to PD standards, such as allowing books to count as formal PD, and emphasized the importance of maintaining diverse perspectives and ensuring PD remains meaningful rather than a mere checkbox activity.

Patterns & trends

Audit

Most of the members audited were compliant with both the required number of hours and in their trainings and/or activities with the PD standards. Many members offered substantive reflections demonstrating deep shifts and/or developments in knowledge, skills, and values. Members were accessing a variety of training and activities that supported their growth as professional social workers.

Lack of detail in descriptions of the activity

In 2023 and 2024 there were between 17-19% of activities submitted where it was not possible for staff to identify the source of the activity, who offered the activity, or any other information that validated or supported the rationale for the activity. Many members would include the title or purpose of an activity, without including supporting documentation or information. Many members also used acronyms for organizations, modalities, and frameworks which did not clearly communicate what the training or activity was.

Reflections not demonstrating development of knowledge, skills, and/or values

While 77-80% of activities and/or trainings submitted indicated there were shifts or development in knowledge, many submissions did not demonstrate strong reflections or reflexivity. Given the priority of self-reflection and reflexivity in social work practice, there is an opportunity to strengthen this area of the PD program.

It is possible that the reflection question members are required to complete is not clear enough or does not reinforce the priority of reflections that include demonstration of learning. Additionally, where members' activity descriptions did not seem aligned with the PD standards, it is possible for their reflections to be used to demonstrate the value and importance of the activity in the development of their social work practice. If members demonstrated growth and learning because of their activity, even if they were not explicitly aligned with the PD standards, they were still considered overall compliant.

Lack of understanding and alignment with PD standards

Most of the members submitted and reported on activities aligned with the PD standards. However, many members submitted activities and reflections that indicate the activity was not aligned with the categories and subcategories for formal, informal, and mandated activities and/or trainings.

- **Mandated Topics:** Many members used NSCSW activities and trainings along with relevant and applicable activities from external organizations. However, the submissions in 2023 and 2024 indicate there is a misalignment between the expectations set out by the NSCSW and the understandings of members.
 - **Social work ethics:** Members would track activities which touched upon ethics but were not specifically related to social work ethics.

- **Anti-racist & Anti-discriminatory practice:** Members often used self-directed activities like reading books, listening to podcasts, and reviewing articles for this sub-category.
- **Truth & reconciliation:** Many members chose to do self-directed activities in this category that were not aligned with the PD standards including reading books and listening to podcasts. While both activities are useful for learning, they are not currently aligned with the sub-category. Additionally,
- **Social justice:** While this category allows for activities, most members chose to do a training in this category.
- **Vicarious trauma & secondary stress:** Informal self-care activities are not eligible to fulfill this requirement, yet many members included informal self-care and personal growth activities such as taking their dog for a walk, using a self-directed workbook, or self-directed recreation and fitness activities.
- **Informal training & activities:**
 - There were many submissions where information was incorrectly categorized as informal or not aligned with the defined sub-categories of informal PD.
 - The largest area of non-compliance was found in the self-care and personal growth categories. Members have submitted activities such as getting a manicure, taking recreational international travel, and walking their dog as activities for their PD. While these areas may support an individual's personal growth and self-care, the submitted reflections and descriptions of activities were not aligned with the PD standards and/or the members did not provide substantial rationale as to how these activities support their development and growth as a social worker.
- **The use of podcasts & books:** Currently, there is an informal PD subcategory for critical review of published materials that allows for up to 5 hours per year in annual PD. However, there was a common trend, especially under the mandated topics of truth & reconciliation and anti-racist & anti-discriminatory practice, where members would use reading articles, books, or listening to podcasts as activities. Podcasts, articles, and books may support development of knowledge, skills, and values, however, there was an over-representation of this format of learning over trainings and externally organized activities.

Survey data & focus groups

Strength of NSCSW offerings

The results of the evaluation surveys and focus groups indicate the PD activities offered by NSCSW are high in quality, directly applicable to practice, and give members the opportunity to partake in progressive and diverse learning opportunities. Members reported a high level of satisfaction with PD activities led by the college.

Diversity in learning needs and desires

Members repeatedly highlighted their hope for more diverse learning opportunities led by NSCSW. There is a spectrum of learning needs across social work practice and practitioners.

Many members have expressed desires for practical clinical skills-based trainings. RSW-Clinical Specialists represent 17% of the NSCSW membership, with many additional members working in clinical and healthcare settings. However, most of the members work in other areas. NSCSW strives to offer skills-based PD activities that support clinical and health focused social work practice, while also balancing the needs for safe(r) social work practice across multiple practice contexts.

The PD standards, policy, and principles further define the focus of NSCSW led activities, ensuring that registered and practicing social workers in Nova Scotia have access to high-quality and relevant PD activities. Members are encouraged to participate in PD activities offered both by NSCSW and external providers. It is not possible to meet the desires of all members. NSCSW remains committed to the delivery and provision of safe(r) social work in Nova Scotia through the PD program and activities.

Misunderstanding of the role of a regulatory College versus an association

In both the surveys and the focus groups it was identified that many members believe NSCSW exists to support the members. Before NSCSW become a regulatory college in 2016, the organization was [originally founded as a professional association](#) (Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers, or NSASW). As a regulator, the College's mandate is now focused on [ensuring public safety](#).

Fortunately, the interests of social workers and the public they serve are generally in alignment. However, when their interests do diverge, **the public must take precedence**.

Recommendations & interventions

Individual member interventions

Out of the 140 audited members, 56 require intervention.

- The members who scored received a score of 0 overall will be required to resubmit their PD for the relevant years.
- Members who received an overall score of 1 will be provided with a letter indicating they were audited, that their PD submission was insufficient, and they will be instructed to review the PD standards to improve the quality of their submissions for the next renewal. They will be invited to reach out the Professional Development Consultant for more specific feedback. Their membership records will be flagged for further review upon the completion of the 2026 registry year.

This approach aligns with socially just and progressive approaches to right-touch regulation. It is assumed that NSCSW members are striving for compliance and will be provided the opportunity to improve. If they do not improve, their records and practice may receive further intervention including and up to practice restrictions.

Wider systematic interventions

The results of the quality assurance process have provided insights to how members can be better supported to complete and report on PD activities that support safe(r) social work practice.

Support & resources for members

Given the high rate of non-compliance with the PD standards, NSCSW can more consistently communicate the requirements of the PD program, including the PD standards.

The PD standards are now consistently referenced in all NSCSW-led PD activities and there is potential for creating resources to better communicate the PD standards, including the formal, informal, and mandated activities. NSCSW will release short videos, publish learning blogs, and better communicate the PD standards through multiple formats to increase awareness of:

- **PD standards:** Many members were compliant with their overall required hours, but not compliant in aligning the activities with the categories and subcategory requirements of the PD standards.
- **Mandated training & activities:** Many members included activities for the mandated training and activities that were not aligned with the PD standards. NSCSW can better communicate the different types of activities and trainings that fit within the categories and sub-categories, along with deepening member awareness of the value of these categories. NSCSW can continue to offer high-quality learning opportunities for these categories.

- **How to demonstrate development of learning in reflections:** As many members submitted reflections that did not demonstrate the shift and/or development of knowledge, values, and/or skills in their learning reflections, more guidance can be provided.

Many members have communicated that using the online registry portal can act as a barrier to recording and reflecting on their PD activities as they complete. To meet this need, an excel spreadsheet template was developed to support members in tracking their PD activities throughout the year. This resource has been provided to members as needed and allows them to accurately track their activities, hours, and complete their reflections on their own devices or using cloud-based applications. This allows them the opportunity to submit their PD activities and reflections by copying and pasting the data from the spreadsheet in the renewals.

Changes to the registry portal

Members are required to submit their annual renewals using the member section of our online registry portal. The interventions above can be supported by changes to the renewal process with more clear language and updated guidance on how to complete the PD activity submissions. The changes include:

- **Providing a direct link to the PD standards in the registry portal:** In reviewing PD activity submissions for the quality assurance, evaluation, and audit there is a clear pattern of members not knowing which PD categories or sub-categories to track their PD activities, or how many hours they can use for their PD. It is hoped that by guiding members to engage with the PD standards, they will be better able to align their submissions with NSCSW regulations.
- **Clarifying language:** In the registry portal on the PD activity submissions page, there is a lack of consistency between language in our PD standards and policy, and opportunities for improvement.
 - In the registry portal, members are asked to identify the *Activity Description* and the *Description of the Activity*. This could potentially cause confusion, and it is recommended that *Activity Description* to be changed to *Sub-Category* to better align with the PD Standards and provide more clarity as this field in the registry portal leads to a drop-down menu of pre-determined sub-categories of the PD Standards.
 - Previously the registry portal referred to the mandated topics as *Required Training*. By changing this field to *Mandated Topics*, there will be more clarity and alignment with the PD standards.
- **Add additional instruction under *Description of Activity*:** More than half of the members included little to no detail about the trainings and activities they completed and submitted for their annual PD submissions. It is hoped that by being clearer in the instructions, they will be better able to provide accurate information to allow for stronger record keeping and auditing. The additional text will be:
 - “What was activity you completed? Who offered the training and/or activity? What were the objectives or goals of the training? Include relevant links to the recordings, event registration page, or course page if possible.”
- **Add additional instruction for the learning reflection:** Many members did not provide substantial learning reflections, either summarizing the content from the session, reflecting on how much they enjoyed the activity, or by using the title of the activity as their reflection. As critical self-reflection and reflexivity are core skills in social work practice, members should be

supported and empowered to critically-reflect and summarize these reflections in their PD activity submissions. It is hoped that by clearly asking for them to demonstrate what knowledge, values, and/or skills were shifted or developed because of the activity they completed, they will provide better reflections in their submissions.

- *“How did this training or activity build or shift your knowledge, values, and/or skills? What is different about your practice as a social worker now as a result of this activity?”*

An alternative approach (Circle of Learning)

Since 2022 the PD committee and staff of NSCSW have been exploring the potential for the creation of alternate pathway for reporting on PD activities.

Starting in 2026 a limited number of members will be invited to participate in an alternative learning and reporting stream that will support them in the development of learning goals, peer review of learning activities, and integration of knowledge, skills, and values. The [2026 Circle of Learning cohort](#) will be a trial; if the program is successful the College may explore expanding it to include more members as an alternative to the current PD program.

Conclusion

NSCSW is privileged to oversee the safe practice of over 3000 social workers in Nova Scotia. This report endeavours to further the NSCSW's commitment to continuous improvement, in our efforts to promote the profession and protect the public. Quality assurance is an ongoing process, and we will continue to evaluate and improve our PD standards (and related member services) to ensure quality and safe(r) social work practice.

Our PD program will continue to strive to meet the evolving needs of safe(r) social work practice and the implementation of promising practices for social workers in Nova Scotia. We strive to maintain the accountability of our profession to the public and to ensure safe(r) practice with the most vulnerable and historically oppressed populations. Our PD program and standards will continue to uphold our commitment to participate in the ongoing process of truth and reconciliation, along with offering relevant, socially just, and progressive learning opportunities for social workers.