

Inter-Provincial Mobility Initiative

Initiative sur la mobilité interprovinciale

Building Momentum and Taking Action: Inter-Provincial Mobility Initiative

The Canadian Counselling Association (CCA) is in a unique position to clarify and support the counselling profession as it addresses the opportunities and challenges associated with the statutory regulation of its members throughout the country. Counselling professionals across Canada have taken on the responsibility and the costs of voluntary self-regulation, including CCA's nationally recognized Canadian Certified Counsellor (CCC) designation. Right now counsellors¹ are regulated by statute in Quebec, Nova Scotia and Ontario. Meanwhile, there are developments that are quickly propelling the profession towards statutory regulation in many other provinces. Legislative initiatives, regulatory advocacy and/or the review of mental health acts are underway in several provinces including New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and British Columbia.

Since the regulation of professions is a provincial responsibility, a diversity of terminology and levels of specificity related to each province's overall legislative framework should be expected. But unless a national dialogue informs each jurisdiction's planning stage, the cohesion, and the mobility of our profession could easily be lost. Furthermore, these new provincially based professional colleges will be facing the labour mobility requirement of the Agreement on Internal Trade. This means that they must make provision for counsellors to move freely between the provinces. This, in turn, means that the time for national leadership is now.

Without such a national collaboration and inter-provincial consultations, we can anticipate some significant differences with respect to such core features as professional titles, scopes of practice, controlled or restricted acts, entry requirements, codes of ethics, and professional standards of practice for the counselling profession. These differences will, in turn, negatively affect the inter-provincial mobility of counselling professionals, potentially fragment the profession, and result in confusion for the public.

As the only national body representing counsellors in all provinces and territories, CCA is in a strong position to provide leadership and expertise toward minimizing barriers to occupational mobility with key stakeholders involved in the regulation of counselling in Canada. With the movement towards increased regulation within the profession, there is an urgent need to discuss ways to eliminate potential barriers to labour mobility for counsellors through the adoption of seamless, uniform standards and requirements in every provincial jurisdiction. Not only would nationally consistent and recognized standards of qualification and regulation for counsellors enhance the profession and

further protect the public, but they would also ensure ease of counsellor mobility across the provinces and territories.

In November 2008, CCA hosted a National Symposium on Inter-Provincial Mobility within the Counselling Profession. This Symposium was funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). The key objectives of the 2008 Symposium were to:

- follow-up and continue the dialogue that began in November 2005 in Vancouver when the first symposium was held, and
- convene a two-day meeting of key stakeholders involved in the regulation of counselling with the purpose of updating all participants on the current status in each jurisdiction and establishing a national collaboration on national standards as well as impediments to occupational mobility.

The timing of the November 2008 National Symposium proved fortuitous. The provincial premiers and territorial leaders met at the Council of the Federation in Quebec City in July 2008 to further secure occupational mobility within the Canadian Federation. At this meeting it was announced that significant amendments were planned for Chapter 7 of the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT). These changes were implemented on April 1, 2009 and tightened the responsibilities of each province and territory to pro-mote ease of mobility for regulated occupations.

One of the key outcomes of the November 2008 Symposium was the identification of a core group of stakeholders who would act as stewards of the profession and develop an action plan to address inter-provincial mobility impediments. Members for this group, known as the Project Working Group, were identified and subsequently a proposal was submitted to HRSDC to fund the next stage in the process of ensuring full mobility for the Canadian counselling profession.

Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) recognized the importance of CCA's work towards the mobility of the counselling profession on April 27, 2009 by funding this next phase.

The stated objectives of this newly funded project are designed to align the counselling profession with the requirements of the Agreement on Internal Trade. More precisely, the objectives focus on Article 707 of Chapter 7, which states that "provinces and territories will, to the extent possible and where practical, adopt occupational standards based on common interprovincial standards". The Working Group will seek to:

- achieve common consensus and support by stakeholders across all jurisdictions for a common code of ethics, scope of practice, standard of practice, client Bill of Rights, entry-to-practice requirements, and professional titles, and

- develop a communications strategy that enables ongoing collaboration across regulated and non-regulated jurisdictions. This strategy will ensure that as each jurisdiction becomes regulated the standards adopted will be conducive to labour mobility.

This new phase of the project will culminate in a two-day Symposium in late 2009. At the two-day meeting, it is anticipated that participants will develop a mechanism that allows general support by stake-holders across all jurisdictions for a common code of ethics, scope of practice, standard of practice, client Bill of Rights, entry-to-practice requirements and professional titles. There will also be the development of a communication strategy among all Canadian jurisdictions on labour mobility. To ensure that national interests are represented, the Project Working Group has a wide variety of expertise, varying backgrounds and jurisdictional diversity.

The current members of the Project Working Group are:

Dr. Glenn Sheppard (Co-Chair) – Newfoundland and Labrador
Dr. Blythe Shepard (Co-Chair) – Alberta and the Northwest Territories
Naseema Siddiqui – Ontario
Dr. Glen Grigg – British Columbia
Kevin VanDerZwet Stafford – Ontario
Deborah Wood Salter – Prince Edward Island
Connie Gerwing – Saskatchewan
Lorna Martin – Manitoba and Nunavut
Roger John – President, CCA Aboriginal Circle
Verlie Wile – Nova Scotia
Dr. Louis Cournoyer – Quebec
Barbara MacCallum – CCA National Office

Please watch for updates about this project on the CCA website and in Cognica. CCA will also be distributing this information as widely as possible to its reciprocal and affiliate members and other interested organizations.

Please feel free to contact the CCA National Office at 613-237-1099 or <mailto:dg@ccacc.ca> for further information about this project.

1. In this article, the general term “counsellors” is used to describe a variety of counselling-related titles including, but not restricted to: counsellor, psychotherapist, mental health therapist, clinical counsellor, career counsellor, pastoral counsellor, and guidance counsellor.