



ALBERTA COLLEGE OF
SOCIAL WORKERS

COMPETENCE PROGRAM GUIDE



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Introduction

Competence is generally understood as “the combined knowledge, skills, attitudes and judgment required to provide professional services”, *Health Professions Act* (HPA), Section 1(1)(f). It is more than just your professional skills but rather the application of these skills in a dynamic work environment.

Competence is about staying current and engaging in lifelong learning that enhances your professional development, skills, and knowledge and improves outcomes for the people you work with.

Continuing professional development is an activity that develops knowledge, skills and competencies for social work practice linked to the context of one's work and/or to their future career development.

The Competence Program Guide is a supplement to ACSW's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics and explains in more detail the obligations of registrants, the ways in which registrants can comply with the Competence Program (CP) and the steps to complete the CP.

Competence Program Legislative Framework

Authority

The *Health Professions Act* regulates the profession of social work in Alberta. Section 50(1) of the HPA requires regulatory colleges to provide a program to maintain competence and enhance the provision of professional activities.

The *Social Workers Professional Regulation* stipulates social workers must complete a minimum of 40 continuing competence credits during each registration year. The *Standards of Practice* describe the minimum requirements that registrants are expected to fulfill to meet the competence requirements.

Confidentiality

Information related to participation in a Competence Program is confidential under section 52 of the HPA. However, the Competence Committee may determine that a referral to the complaints director is necessary based on information obtained through the Competence Program that:

- the registrant has intentionally provided false or misleading information;
- the registrant displays a lack of competence in the provision of professional services that has not been remedied by participating in the CP;
- the registrant may be incapacitated; or
- the conduct of the registrant constitutes unprofessional conduct that cannot be readily remedied by means of the CP.

Failure or Refusal to Comply

Failure or refusal to meet the Competence Program requirements is considered unprofessional conduct under the HPA and ACSW's Standards of Practice and may result in sanctions or affect the ability of registrants to renew their practice permit.

Competence Program Principles

ACSW's Competence Program is guided by the following principles:

1. **Responsive:** nimble and flexible to accommodate and incorporate changes in practices, diversity in learning approaches and ways of demonstrating competence
2. **Proactive:** to engage social workers, inspire intentional career-long learning, peer-to-peer interaction, and opportunities to connect with mentors, and subject matter experts
3. **Future Oriented:** to help meet the dynamic and changing needs of Albertans, integrate with other ACSW departments, and provide support throughout careers
4. **Sustainable:** relevant, practical and feasible to implement, and proportionate to public risk
5. **Accountable:** meets legislative requirements and provides reliable assessments and measures that confidently establish that social workers are competent to provide safe and effective care

Competence Program Cycles

The program cycle includes self-assessment activities, development of a professional development plan, completion of identified activities, and a reflection and evaluation.



Participation

The Competence Program is registrant-directed, meaning that the ACSW sets the competence activity types, **but the selection of activities is intended to be driven by you, and be meaningful and relevant to your practice.**

All registrants are required to participate in the annual Competence Program regardless of your registration or employment status.

If there are circumstances that prevent completion of the competence requirements, refer to the [competence accommodation and exception policy](#) and [submit a request](#).

PRACTICE CHANGE

All Registrants are required to complete 40 credits of professional development.

- ◆ Full time or part time
- ◆ Active or Inactive
- ◆ With or Without a Clinical Practice Enhancement

Competence and Registration Renewal

The Competence Program runs on a calendar year cycle. All registrants will start the annual competence program requirements each January and complete them by the end of December each year.

Social workers who register or reinstate during the year will have their competence self-assessment activities unlocked upon registration or reinstatement. You will have four weeks to complete the required self-assessment activities and the professional development plan.

Competence and Registration Requirements

Self-Assessment

The self-assessment component of the Competence Program is the first step in completing your requirements. It is comprised of three separate activities:

1. Annual competence update
2. Wellness worksheet
3. Reflective practice worksheet

The **annual competence update** is completed directly in the registrant portal.

The **wellness assessment worksheet** and the **reflective practice worksheet** are not completed in the registrant portal. They are downloaded and saved in your portfolio.

1. Annual Competence Update

This is the first self-assessment activity. It requires you to think about and describe your practice setting and consider both the achievements and challenges in your practice to inform the development of your professional development plan. Self-assessment does not need to - but can include - seeking and gathering feedback and information from peers, teachers, supervisors and clients. Additional tools to help inform self-assessment including [seeking feedback](#) are available on the ACSW website. The annual competence update starts with a series of yes and no questions.

Review the associated Standards of Practice requirement before answering these questions and depending upon your response consider whether you require a professional development activity in your plan to meet the standards of practice requirement. Each of these questions relates to a specific standard of practice that requires one time or ongoing competence activities (supervision or consultation, education or training)

There is no right or wrong answer as this is a question at one point in time and may change throughout the year. The intention is to draw your attention to the standards.

The following table shows the yes/no questions found in the annual competence update with a reference to the specific ACSW Standard.

Question	Standards of Practice Reference
Are you performing the restricted activity of psychosocial intervention?	Standard E. Professional Practice E.5 Restricted Activity: Psychosocial Intervention 9 (d)
Are you providing supervision?	Standard G. Professional Accountability G.1 Within the Profession(i)
Are you on the provisional register?	ACSW Website, Registrant FAQs RSWs who have provisional supervised practice requirements must demonstrate that they have completed their specified hours of regulated social work practice under the supervision of an RSW who is on the general registry.
Have you received training and supervision for assessment instruments in your practice prior to using them independently?	Standard B. General Registration Requirements B.6 Use of Assessment Instruments (a)
Have you accessed training to stay current with technology used for providing services (such as virtual services, scheduling apps, AI)?	Standard E. Professional Practice E.3 Technology in the Workplace (a)(j)

Question	Standards of Practice Reference
Have you added new services or techniques to your practice in the last year?	Standard E. Professional Practice E.4 Limits on Practice and Adding New Services and Techniques (b)(d)
Have you accessed supervision or consultation if you are providing services where a dual or multiple role/relationship exists?	Standard F. Professional Relationships F.5 Dual/Multiple Role Relationship (e)

2. Wellness Assessment Worksheet

The second activity required to complete the self-assessment is completing the wellness assessment worksheet.

Providing safe, competent, and ethical care to clients is a professional responsibility. Social workers must take steps to maintain personal and professional wellness to help avoid conditions that could result in impaired judgement and interfere with your ability to practice ethically. Monitoring your own health and participating in activities that help to achieve and maintain wellness are part of the Competence Program.

The [wellness assessment worksheet](#) is accessed through the registrant portal. Once you have accessed it, you must download and save a copy to your computer. You will complete it and retain in your own portfolio. The wellness assessment worksheet is NOT retained in the registrant portal. Use the wellness assessment worksheet for your benefit, you may wish to answer all of the questions in each domain, or write some general notes and reflections.

3. Reflective Practice Worksheet

The last self-assessment activity to complete is the [reflective practice worksheet](#). Completing this worksheet is a way to deepen your professional insight and shape meaningful professional development goals.

Social work practice occurs in a context that includes our own personal, social, environmental and structural factors. Each of these factors can enhance, impede or influence your practice. Asking you to reflect on your own context is intended to help you determine potential competence activities.

The reflective practice worksheet is accessed through the registrant portal. Once you have accessed it, you must download and save a copy to your computer. You will complete it and retain in your own portfolio. The reflective practice worksheet is NOT retained in the registrant portal.

Professional Development Plan

The annual professional development plan is the second component of the Competence Program cycle. The professional development plan provides a roadmap that outlines the goals you set for yourself and associated activities including the start date, the number of hours the activities will take, and the expected impact of the activities for your practice.

Registrants should spend 40 hours annually on continuing professional development. You will be required to enter professional development goals and activities in two categories:

- Continuing education
- Professional engagement

The tables below provide a definition of each category with sample activities.

Continuing Education

Education should be related to the population, services, or activities you are providing or the practice you are intending to provide in the coming year that result in meaningful growth in knowledge and practice of social work.

Sample Activities

- Course, workshop, webinar
- Certificate completion
- Attending a conference
- Reading research papers
- Conducting new research
- Program development
- Policy/practice support development
- Process improvement project
- New course/workshop/education development
- New cultural or Indigenous activities

Professional Engagement

Active involvement with a professional community of social work peers that facilitates learning, collaboration and relationship building.

Sample Activities

- Providing or receiving supervision
- Mentorship
- Participating in a community of practice
- Practice-related discussion group
- Peer circle participation
- Teaching or providing education
- Case review
- ACSW volunteerism (e.g., advisory group or committee participation)
- Professional association active participation (e.g., SWAA, social justice activities, etc.)

Developing Goals and Activities

Having a professional development plan can help you visualize, work toward, and achieve a goal, whether it is a new skill, knowledge or expertise in a particular subject or practice area or the ability to complete an unfamiliar task.

Matching the activity to the goal is particularly important when it comes to reviewing or measuring the impact completing that activity has on your competence. [Click here](#) for additional resources that will help you with goal setting.

Social workers are required to enter a minimum of one goal for continuing education and one goal for professional engagement. The goals and activities must be related to your area of practice or intended area of practice. Ideally, there will be a connection between the self-assessment activities and your professional development plan. If you are unsure whether an activity would count towards continuing education or professional engagement, [click here](#) to view our Continuing Education or Professional Engagement resource.

Entering Goals and Activities

Goals and activities are entered and saved in the registrant portal. Unlike the self-assessment activity, the professional development plan can be updated throughout the year. By February 1 each year, you must establish your initial goals and activities.

During the year, your practice may shift so you need to change your goals or activities. An activity you intended to complete might become unavailable or you might find another that's more suitable. It is important you keep the goals and activities updated.

While you can update your planned goals and activities at any time, the activities must always add up to at least 40 hours. If a planned activity ends up being shorter than planned, you'll need to add another activity to meet the 40-hour minimum.

You're now able to record continuing education activities that extend from your current year into the next one. For example, you begin supervising a student whose practice begins in September and ends in April. You would enter this as a professional engagement activity in the year it started. You could use it again in the following competence year. In that case, you would add the activity in your current competence year, and only count the hours completed in the current year.

You would then check the box indicating that the activity is in progress and will be carried over, as shown in the example below. While the activity can take place across two years, you can not carry over hours from one year to the next. Hours count only in the year you complete them. You also can not add activities to a year that has passed.

CONTINUING EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

Add To add another activity, click the ADD button.

Activity	Delete
Start Date * Activity	<input type="text" value="2025-11-26"/> * Hours
* Brief description of the activity (Limit 2500 characters) <input type="text" value="test"/>	
* Status	
<input type="radio"/> Incomplete <input type="radio"/> Activity completed <input checked="" type="radio"/> Activity in progress and will be carried over	

When establishing goals and activities, it is important to be aware of the [Standards of Practice](#) and any education, training, supervision or consultation requirements that are explicitly described in the standards.

For example, in Standard B.6, Use of Assessment Instruments, section a says “a social worker will receive training and supervision as is appropriate prior to using assessment instruments independently.”

If you or your organization are planning to use a new screening tool, you may consider an associated goal and activity in your professional development plan.

Summary of Requirements

Category	Minimum Number of Hours
Continuing Education	15
Professional Engagement	15
Professional Engagement OR Continuing Education	10
Total	40

Summary of Requirements

Creating a Portfolio

A portfolio is an intentional collection of carefully selected materials that provides evidence of a social worker's professional development over time. It is one way to record your educational and professional achievements and your competence to practice relative to the Standards of Practice. A portfolio can help you demonstrate your commitment to lifelong learning and can help you as you set career goals for yourself by providing a roadmap of strengths and learning needs relative to your career goals.

A portfolio may be requested as part of a practice audit. There is no prescribed structure for the portfolio. You may choose to maintain a hard copy of your portfolio or a digital copy. The decision is up to you. If requested, you will be asked to send evidence electronically. [Click here](#) for additional information on portfolios.

You must maintain your portfolio for a period of five years. It must include evidence to support your participation in the competence program and be aligned with the professional development goals established in the professional development plan.

Remember that any evidence you add to your portfolio should be non-identifying or de-identified or have consent from the client to include in the portfolio.

Evaluation and Reflection

This last component of the competence program is evaluation and reflection.

Reflection is a process which helps you gain insight into your practice by intentionally thinking about your practice at a deeper level, questioning your approach, engaging with your feelings, beliefs and attitudes, and gaining greater self-awareness. [Click here](#) for additional information on reflective practice.

Once you have completed an activity, you can check the status box to indicate it is complete, and the reflection questions will be made available to you. You can choose to complete this as soon as you have completed an activity, or by the end of December deadline.

In this example, the status shows that the activity is incomplete so the reflection question is greyed out and unavailable to edit.

- * Status
- Incomplete
- Activity completed
- Activity in progress and will be carried over

Reflection

By the end of December of each year, registrants are required to complete the evaluation of learnings and the reflection sections of the plan.

Reflection is a process which helps you gain insight into your practice by intentionally thinking about your practice at a deeper level, questioning your approach, engaging with your feelings, beliefs and attitudes and gaining greater self-awareness. Gathering feedback from others familiar with your practice can supplement the reflection. The insights developed and lessons learned can lead to improvements or developments in your practice and inform future professional development plans.

Reflection must include the following elements:

These requirements are intended to motivate careful thought about the link between a specific learning activity and practice.

Looking back, which [Standard\(s\) of Practice](#) or [Ethical Principle\(s\)](#) were addressed by participating in these activities?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Standard(s) of Practice <input type="checkbox"/> General practice requirements <input type="checkbox"/> Fees and Statements <input type="checkbox"/> Record keeping and confidentiality <input type="checkbox"/> Professional practice <input type="checkbox"/> Professional relationships <input type="checkbox"/> Professional accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Ethical Principle(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Ethical Principles <input type="checkbox"/> Respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons <input type="checkbox"/> Pursuit of social justice <input type="checkbox"/> Service to humanity <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity in professional practice <input type="checkbox"/> Confidentiality in professional practice <input type="checkbox"/> Competence in professional practice
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In the following example, the status shows that the activity is complete and the reflection questions are now available to edit.

- * Status
- Incomplete
- Activity completed
- Activity in progress and will be carried over

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For the most complete and current information about the Competence Program,
please visit ACSW.ab.ca.

Competence Program Checklist

Self-Assessment

- **Annual Competence Update** (saved in portal)
- **Wellness Worksheet** – download and save to your computer (not saved in portal)
- **Reflective Practice Worksheet** – download and save to your portfolio (not saved in portal)

Start the self-assessment on January 1st or upon initial registration or re-instatement. This portion will lock on February 1st, or 4 weeks after your initial registration or re-instatement, and not be editable after this date.

Professional Development Plan

Continuing Education

- Have written at least one goal
- Have written at least one corresponding activity
- Have identified a minimum of 15 continuing education hours

Professional Engagement

- Have written at least one goal
- Have written at least one corresponding activity
- Have identified a minimum of 15 professional engagement hours

Total Competence Activities must equal 40 hours. Have allocated remaining 10 hours to:

- Continuing Education
- Professional Engagement
- A combination of both

Start developing your professional development plan on January 1st, or upon initial registration or re-instatement, and complete prior to February 1st or 4 weeks after your initial registration or re-instatement.

The Professional Development Plan can be edited throughout the year as needed

Professional Development Activities

- Have completed activities to reach **40 total hours**
- Added supporting document to my personal portfolio

These activities are completed throughout the competence year, but must be completed prior to December 31st.

Evaluation and Reflection

- Have completed a reflection for each activity

Start the reflection activity once you have completed an activity. This is completed in the registrant portal and must be completed annually by December 31st .



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