

THE MATTER OF THE *HEALTH PROFESSIONS ACT*, R.S.A. 2000, c.H-7;

AND IN THE MATTER OF A HEARING INTO THE CONDUCT OF DENNIS SHINSKI, A MEMBER OF THE ALBERTA COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORKERS;

AND IN THE MATTER OF A PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT HEARING REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF DENNIS SHINSKI UNDERTAKEN VIRTUALLY;

DECISION OF THE HEARING TRIBUNAL

I. INTRODUCTION

1. A hearing was held virtually on June 11, 2026 concerning allegations of unprofessional conduct against Dennis Shinski (the “**Member**”), a regulated member of the Alberta College of Social Workers (“**ACSW**”). The hearing occurred by consent via a virtual platform through the Edmonton office of Parlee McLaws.
2. This decision sets out the findings, reasons and penalty orders of the Hearing Tribunal concerning the hearing.
3. The Hearing Tribunal was assisted by Blair E. Maxston, K.C. as independent legal counsel, including in the drafting of this decision.

II. THE HEARING GENERALLY

4. The June 11, 2026 hearing was held pursuant to the *Health Professions Act*, R.S.A. 2000, c.H-7 as amended (the “**HPA**”).
5. The members of the Hearing Tribunal were:

Stanley Haroun, MSW, RSW (Chair)
Tracey Louis, RSW
Judy Tran, Public Member
Iqra Nazir, Public Member

Also participating in the hearing were Sheryl Pearson (ACSW Complaints Director) and Karen Smith K.C. (legal counsel for the ACSW Complaints Director). Olivia Klimosko, a summer student at the Parlee McLaws firm, attended the hearing as an observer.

The Member participated in the hearing. The Member acknowledged he was aware of his right to be represented by legal counsel but was proceeding with the hearing without legal representation.

The Complainant (T.L.) also was present as an observer.

6. The hearing was a public hearing pursuant to s. 78 of the *HPA*. There were no objections regarding the timeliness of service of the Notice of Hearing and no objections regarding the composition or jurisdiction of the Hearing Tribunal. As well, there were no preliminary applications (including no application to hold all or a part of the hearing in private).
7. The allegations were set out in a Notice of Hearing dated April 22, 2026 (the “**Notice of Hearing**”). The allegations relate to events when the Member was employed at Northern Addictions Centre (“**NAC**”) in Grande Prairie, Alberta as an addictions counsellor. Specifically, the allegations arise from the Member’s interactions with BG who was a resident/client at NAC and who the Member was assigned to as a counsellor. The allegations in the Notice of Hearing are as follows:

Sexual Abuse and Prohibited Relationship:

1. That subsequent to BG’s discharge from NAC in August/September 2023, you engaged in a sexual relationship with BG between August 2023 and February 2024.

Such conduct contravenes ss. A(o) and (v), F.1(e), F.3(a)(b) and F.7(a)(i) of the Standards of Practice 2023, Values 4 and 6 of the Code of Ethics 2005 and constitutes unprofessional conduct pursuant to s.1(1) (pp) (i) (ii) and (xii) of the *Health Professions Act*.

Professional Boundaries:

2. In the alternative to allegation #1, that subsequent to BG’s discharge from NAC in August/September 2023, you became engaged in a personal and intimate relationship with BG.

Such conduct contravenes ss. E.1(c), E.3(i) F.1 (e)(g), F.3 (a)(b) and (d) and G.1 (b)(i) of the Standards of Practice 2023, Values 4 and 6 of the Code of Ethics 2005 and constitutes unprofessional conduct pursuant to s.1(1) (pp) (i) (ii) and (xii) of the *Health Professions Act*.

Dual-Role Relationship

3. You had a pre-existing personal relationship with BG through the recovery community prior to her entry to NAC as a resident and you failed to appropriately manage this dual-role relationship, including failing to fully advise your supervisor of the extent and nature of your preexisting relationship with BG.

Such conduct contravenes ss. F.5(b) of the Standards of Practice 2023, Values 4 and 6 of the Code of Ethics 2005 and constitutes unprofessional conduct pursuant to s. 1(1) (pp) (i) (ii) and (xii) of the *Health Professions Act*.

8. Pursuant to s.70(1) of the *HPA*, the Member provided a written admission of unprofessional conduct to the Hearing Tribunal dated June 11, 2026, stating that the Member admitted that the following allegations constituted unprofessional conduct:

PROHIBITED RELATIONSHIP:

1. That subsequent to BG's discharge from NAC in August/September 2023, I engaged in a sexual relationship with BG between August 2023 and February 2024.

Such conduct contravenes ss. A(o) and (v), F.1(e), F.3(a)(b) and F.7(a)(i) of the Standards of Practice 2023, Values 4 and 6 of the Code of Ethics 2005 and constitutes unprofessional conduct pursuant to s. 1(1) (pp) (i) (ii) and (xii) of the *Health Professions Act*.

PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES:

2. That subsequent to BG's discharge from NAC in August/September 2023, I became engaged in a personal and intimate relationship with BG.

Such conduct contravenes ss. E.1(c), E.3(i) F.1 (e)(g), F.3 (a)(b) and (d) and G.1 (b)(i) of the Standards of Practice 2023, Values 4 and 6 of the Code of Ethics 2005 and constitutes unprofessional conduct pursuant to s. 1(1) (pp) (i) (ii) and (xii) of the *Health Professions Act*.

DUAL-ROLE RELATIONSHIP:

3. I had a pre-existing personal relationship with BG through the recovery community prior to her entry to NAC as a resident and I failed to appropriately manage this dual-role relationship, including failing to fully advise my supervisor of the extent and nature of this pre-existing relationship with BG.

Such conduct contravenes ss. F.5(b) of the Standards of Practice 2023, Values 4 and 6 of the Code of Ethics 2005 and constitutes unprofessional conduct pursuant to s. 1(1) (pp) (i) (ii) and (xii) of the *Health Professions Act*.

(the "**Allegations**")

9. The following documents were entered as Exhibits at the hearing with the consent of both parties:

Exhibit 1: Notice of Hearing.

Exhibit 2: Notice to Attend.

Exhibit 3: Investigation Report.

Exhibit 4: Affidavit of Service

Exhibit 5: Admission of Unprofessional Conduct (the "**Admission**").

Exhibit 6: Consent Order (the "**Consent Order**").

10. Since the hearing proceeded as a consent hearing, the Hearing Tribunal heard from no witnesses at the hearing.

III. **THE HEARING AND THE CONSENT ORDER**

11. The Consent Order contained a “Agreed Statement of Facts”, “Agreed Findings”, “Acknowledgment of Responsibility” and “No Right to Appeal” sections.
12. The Consent Order also contained a “Orders as to Sanctions” section (the “**Sanction Orders**”) and a costs order.

A. Agreed Statement of Facts

13. The facts in this matter are not in dispute and are described in the Agreed Statement of Facts as follows:
 - “1. Mr. Shinski has been registered as a Registered Social Worker with the Alberta College of Social Workers (“ACSW”) since December 1, 2021.
 2. Mr. Shinski was at all material times, employed at Northern Addictions Centre (“NAC”) in Grande Prairie, Alberta as an addictions counsellor.
 3. Mr. Shinski and BG had been friends and/or acquaintances since 2019.
 4. BG became a resident/client at NAC during the spring/summer period of 2023.
 5. While BG was a resident/client at NAC, Mr. Shinski was her assigned counsellor.
 6. Mr. Shinski resigned from NAC in February 2024.
 7. Subsequent to BG’s discharge from NAC, Mr. Shinski engaged in a sexual relationship with BG.”

B. Acknowledgment of Responsibility and Unprofessional Conduct

14. It was acknowledged by the Member and the ACSW Complaints Director that the Member’s conduct as described in the Agreed Statement of Facts and the Admission constitutes unprofessional conduct.

C. No Right to Appeal

15. The ACSW and the Member agreed that there shall be no appeal from the Consent Order notwithstanding s. 87 of the *HPA*.

IV. **LIABILITY, SANCTIONS AND COSTS MATTERS**

A. Submissions from the Complaints Director

16. Ms. Smith’s submissions can be summarized as follows:
 - Ms. Smith reviewed the Complaints Director’s duties pursuant to s.66 of the *HPA* and that this matter was originally set for a contested hearing.

- After Court proceedings by the Member had concluded, a without prejudice “responsibility” settlement meeting occurred and that resulted in the Admission and the joint penalty proposal.
- The Admission duplicates the charges in the Notice of Hearing but the phrase “Sexual Abuse” was removed from the heading for charge 1.
- Ms. Smith reviewed section 70 of the *HPA* and the Hearing Tribunal’s role. The Hearing Tribunal needs two things: the factual matrix to support the charges and whether those facts and the admissions fall within the definition of unprofessional conduct in the *HPA*.
- The Agreed Statement of Facts in the Consent Order can be accepted as true evidence. The Hearing Tribunal should be cautious about considering the statements in the investigation report since they have not been tested under oath and have not been subject to cross-examination. They cannot be taken for the truth of their contents but they provide context.
- There is an ample factual basis to accept the Admissions.
- The Admissions clearly fall within the definition of unprofessional conduct in the *HPA* as they relate to some of the most severe unprofessional conduct and breach a fundamental rule that a social worker should not have a personal sexual relationship with a patient.
- The Member readily took responsibility for his actions at the settlement meeting.
- Ms. Smith reviewed the five considerations for sanctions orders: protection of the public, deterrence for the member and the profession, rehabilitation for the member, fairness to the Member in terms of comparable consequences for comparable actions and maintaining the integrity of the profession.
- Ms. Smith reviewed the penalty factors in the *Jaswal v. Medical Board (Nfld.)*, 1996 CanLII 11630 (NL SC) case. In terms of the nature and gravity of the unprofessional conduct this is some of the most severe unprofessional conduct.
- The Member has been a regulated member since 2021 and is therefore a newer member.
- There is no past discipline history for the Member.
- As is the case with all social work patients, the patient was in a vulnerable position. This is an aggravating factor.
- The unprofessional conduct occurred over a period of time. The unprofessional conduct did not occur as one instance. This is an aggravating factor.
- In terms of the role of the Member, he has taken responsibility. This is a mitigating factor.
- In terms of other consequences, the Member has not been registered since 2025.

- In terms of the impact on the patient, this is an aggravating factor.
- Ms. Smith reviewed the statutory authority for the Hearing Tribunal to make penalty orders and costs orders under section 82(1) of the *HPA*.
- Ms. Smith reviewed the Consent Order sanctions orders. The reprimand is a chastization in writing.
- In terms of order 2, the Member's registration is cancelled for five (5) years. This is not a suspension. The Member is removed from the profession and is required to reapply for registration, including satisfying the good character requirement for registration.
- Ms. Smith reviewed the order 3 ethics course requirement and the two (2) year supervision requirement set out in order 4. Ms. Smith also reviewed the standard enforcement authority of the Complaints Director set out in order 5.
- In terms of order 6, publication with name is required in terms of public protection.
- A costs order is a separate and distinct order. A \$1,000.00 costs order is appropriate.
- Ms. Smith reviewed the public interest test requiring great deference to joint penalty proposals. The Hearing Tribunal should not depart from the joint penalty proposal unless it brings the administration of justice into disrepute or adversely affects the integrity of the profession.
- The Hearing Tribunal must give considerable respect to the joint penalty proposal. Among other things, consent hearings avoid the time and cost associated with requiring all hearings to be contested.

B. Submissions from the Member

17. The Member's submissions can be summarized as follows:

- The Member is sorry for everything that happened to family and friends and everyone else impacted by his actions.
- The Member has been taking counselling and accepts responsibility for this matter.
- The Member wishes he could take back what happened but there must be consequences. He is very sorry and is trying to reflect on the impact of his actions on the client and others.

C. The Hearing Tribunal's Decision: Unprofessional Conduct, Sanction Orders and Costs Orders

18. After caucusing in private, the Hearing Tribunal advised the parties that it was accepting the admissions concerning the Allegations, that it was making findings of unprofessional conduct regarding the admitted Allegations and that it was accepting the sanctions and costs proposal from the parties. The Hearing Tribunal confirmed that its orders were effective as of the date of the hearing.

V. REASONS FOR DECISION: THE ALLEGATIONS

A. Generally

19. The ACSW is a self-governing professional body established under the *HPA* and is responsible for regulation of the Social Work profession in the public interest. This includes ensuring that all ACSW regulated members practice their profession in a manner that protects the public from unsafe, incompetent or unethical acts. Of significant importance is ensuring that ACSW regulated members do not engage in prohibited relationships, do not breach professional boundaries and do not engage in prohibited dual-role relationships.
20. The Hearing Tribunal sees protection of the public as the primary consideration in this matter.
21. After carefully considering all of the information and evidence presented during the Hearing, the Hearing Tribunal accepts all of the admissions of unprofessional conduct by the Member.
22. The factual basis for the three Allegations was proven as the result of uncontradicted evidence presented to the Hearing Tribunal. Bearing in mind the Admission signed by the Member, the Hearing Tribunal also concluded that the proven actions of the Member constituted unprofessional conduct as they were a clear breach of the Member's ethical and professional obligations.

B. Analysis

23. In terms of Allegations 1 and 2, members of the social work profession are not permitted to have sexual relationships with clients as those constitute prohibited relationships and boundary violations. The relationship between a patient and a social worker involves a power imbalance and the patient is in a vulnerable position. As well, the patient places trust in the social worker to act professionally and ethically. Having an inappropriate intimate sexual relationship with BG was highly unprofessional and was a breach of the core fundamental ethical obligations of a social worker.

24. In terms of Allegation 3, it is extremely important for a social worker to manage dual-role relationships proactively and responsively, including full and proper disclosure to supervisors about the extent and nature of any pre-existing relationship. The Member failed to meet the clear and express obligations he had in that regard and this was a deliberate choice made by the Member.
25. The Member's actions were clearly unprofessional conduct. This was not a "grey area". Instead, the Member's choices were deliberate and were a marked departure from the professional and ethical obligations of a Social Worker.
26. Based on this evidence, the Hearing Tribunal finds the Allegations factually proven and that they represent serious and egregious behavior. Those actions clearly unquestionably breach the ACSW's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics and clearly constitute unprofessional conduct under the HPA.

VI. **REASONS FOR DECISION: SANCTIONS**

A. **The Joint Sanctions Proposal**

27. As part of the Consent Order, the parties also jointly presented an Orders as to Sanctions (the "**Sanction Orders**") recommendation and a costs order (the "**Costs Order**") as follows:

"Sanctions Orders"

1. A Reprimand shall be issued as against Mr. Shinski.
2. Mr. Shinski's permit to practice will be cancelled for a minimum of five (5) years, from the date his permit was last active (February 1, 2025).
3. Prior to Mr. Shinski's return to the practice of social work, and prior to his application for registration, he will be obliged to successfully complete the continuing education university course Ethics and Risk-Management Challenges in Social Work. The course shall be approved by the Complaints Director and shall be undertaken at the cost of Mr. Shinski.
4. Upon his return to the practice of social work, Mr. Shinski's practice shall be subject to supervision for a two (2) year period. The supervisor may be inside or outside of the employment of Mr. Shinski but must be approved by the Complaints Director. The ACSW Complaints Director shall be entitled to receive appropriate reporting from the supervisor. Any cost associated with the supervision will be the responsibility of Mr. Shinski. Mr. Shinski's permit to practice shall reflect the supervision obligation.
5. The Complaints Director shall maintain the discretion to suspend Mr. Shinski's permit to practice pending a Hearing should the Complaints Director, in his/her sole discretion, conclude that Mr. Shinski has breached this Order.
6. There shall be publication of this decision and reasons on a "with names" basis.

Costs

1. Mr. Shinski shall pay costs of this matter in the amount of \$1,000.00 within six (6) months of the date of this Order."

28. The Hearing Tribunal is accepting the Sanction Orders and the Costs Order for the reasons described below.

B. The Sanction Orders and the Public Interest Test

29. The Hearing Tribunal acknowledges the significant efforts of the parties in preparing the Consent Order, the Sanction Orders and the Costs Order. The Hearing Tribunal is also aware of the well-established legal principles indicating that deference should be shown to joint submissions on penalties as they promote certainty for both the member and the regulatory body, reduce the time and cost associated with contested hearings and are the result of careful negotiation.
30. Although the Hearing Tribunal retains ultimate discretion in terms of making penalty orders, it is aware of the legal principles which establish that a decision-maker (such as this Hearing Tribunal) should not depart from a joint submission on sanction unless the joint submission brings the administration of justice into disrepute or is contrary to the public interest.
31. For the reasons set out in this decision, the Hearing Tribunal finds that the public interest test for accepting the Sanction Orders was met.
32. The proposed penalty orders must and do convey to the Member, the profession and the public that this conduct will not be tolerated by the ACSW. The ACSW has a clear public protection mandate and an obligation to uphold the integrity of the profession of social work in the eyes of the public.
33. Ultimately, the Hearing Tribunal concludes that the proposed sanctions are reasonable and appropriate and reflect the serious nature of the Member's conduct, the rehabilitation of the Member and his clear acceptance of responsibility for his actions. Very importantly, by the Member admitting unprofessional conduct and agreeing to the terms of a consent hearing, both parties avoided the time, cost and uncertainty associated with a contested hearing which could have been very lengthy.
34. Publishing this decision with the Member's name is a serious but proportionate consequence for the Member having regard to the nature of the unprofessional conduct and the need for public protection. Publication with name in concert with the other penalty orders will serve as a specific deterrent to the Member as well as a general deterrent to other social workers that this type of conduct will not be tolerated and will result in significant penalty orders.
35. Consistent with submissions from the Complaints Director's legal counsel, the Hearing Tribunal views a costs order as separate and distinct from a sanction or penalty order. Requiring the Member to pay \$1,000.00 within six (6) months of the date of the Hearing Tribunal's order is fair and reasonable having regard to the overall costs which would have been incurred by the College in addressing this matter.

The overall costs to the Member (including the costs order itself and the effect of suspension), represent a significant financial impact on the Member but are fair and reasonable having regard to his actions.

36. In summary, the Hearing Tribunal concludes that the sanctions recommended by both parties are fair, reasonable and appropriate and reflect the seriousness of the Member's conduct as well as his acceptance of responsibility for those actions. They also reflect his efforts in resolving these matters by way of a consent hearing.
37. Accordingly, the Hearing Tribunal makes the following orders in accordance with s. 82 of the *HPA*:

Orders as to Sanctions

1. A Reprimand shall be issued as against the Member.
2. The Member's permit to practice will be cancelled for a minimum of five (5) years, from the date his permit was last active (February 1, 2025).
3. Prior to the Member's return to the practice of social work, and prior to his application for registration, he will be obliged to successfully complete the continuing education university course Ethics and Risk-Management Challenges in Social Work. The course shall be approved by the Complaints Director and shall be undertaken at the cost of the Member.
4. Upon his return to the practice of social work, the Member's practice shall be subject to supervision for a two (2) year period. The supervisor may be inside or outside of the employment of the Member but must be approved by the Complaints Director. The ACSW Complaints Director shall be entitled to receive appropriate reporting from the supervisor. Any cost associated with the supervision will be the responsibility of the Member. The Member's permit to practice shall reflect the supervision obligation.
5. The Complaints Director shall maintain the discretion to suspend the Member's permit to practice pending a Hearing should the Complaints Director, in his/her sole discretion, conclude that the Member has breached this Order.
6. There shall be publication of this decision and reasons on a "with names" basis.

Costs Order

1. The Member shall pay costs of this matter in the amount of \$1,000.00 within six (6) months of the date of this Order.

Dated this 20th day of July, 2026.



Stanley Haroun, MSW, RSW
Chair on behalf of the Hearing Tribunal