



Ontario College of
Social Workers and
Social Service Workers

Ordre des travailleurs
sociaux et des techniciens
en travail social de l'Ontario

250 Bloor Street E.
Suite 1000
Toronto, ON M4W 1E6

Phone: 416-972-9882
Fax: 416-972-1512
ocswssw.org

Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

Submission to the Standing Committee on Social Policy May 14, 2021

Submitted By:

Lise Betteridge, MSW, RSW
Registrar and CEO

Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

Tel: 416.972.9882/ 877.828.9380, ext. 225

Email: LBetteridge@ocswssw.org

Web: ocswssw.org



Ontario College of
Social Workers and
Social Service Workers

Ordre des travailleurs
sociaux et des techniciens
en travail social de l'Ontario

250 Bloor Street E.
Suite 1000
Toronto, ON M4W 1E6

Phone: 416-972-9882
Fax: 416-972-1512
ocswssw.org

Summary of Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION #1: Behavioural clinicians and/or those using behavioural techniques who are already registered with another regulatory college should not be required to register with the College of Psychologists of Ontario. This is an unnecessary duplication of oversight efforts which would also place an undue regulatory burden on those professionals.

RECOMMENDATION #2: That the Ministries continue to engage the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (as well as other impacted colleges) on possible regulatory changes.



1. Introduction

The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (the College) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in response to the proposed legislative changes regarding Applied Behavioural Analysts, in the *Advancing Oversight and Planning in Ontario's Health System Act, 2021*.

As the regulatory body for social workers and social service workers in Ontario, the College regulates the practice of over 24,000 members with a mandate to serve and protect the public interest through self-regulation of the professions.

The College fulfills its public protection mandate in a number of ways, including:

- **Setting entry-to-practice requirements** which ensure only those with specific educational qualifications are eligible for registration. The College maintains strict registration processes (including equivalency) which include multiple checks and balances to ensure required documents are received directly from fully-accredited academic programs within authorized academic institutions. This addresses the risk posed by “fake degrees” and other misrepresentations of qualifications.
- Ensuring that only those registered with the College use the **protected titles** “social worker/registered social worker” and “social service worker/registered social service worker” or **hold themselves out** as a social worker or social service worker.
- Setting, maintaining and ensuring that all members follow the **Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice**. These are the minimum standards that apply to all practice areas and contexts including work involving behavioural techniques and/or Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA). Especially relevant in this context are principles related to competence and integrity, confidentiality and record-keeping and sexual misconduct. Members are also required to engage in ongoing learning through the **Continuing Competence Program (CCP)**.
- **Maintaining rigorous complaints and discipline processes**. These differ from government oversight systems and process-oriented mechanisms and those put in place by individual employers. Registration with the College ensures a person cannot move from employer to employer when there is a concern that their practice does not meet minimum standards.

The *Advancing Oversight and Planning in Ontario's Health System Act, 2021* proposes to regulate the profession of ABA as a new profession under the current College of Psychologists of Ontario (CPO). While the College recognizes the need for regulation of ABAs, given the risk of harm to the vulnerable clients and communities to whom they provide services, we are concerned that the proposed legislation may impose an unnecessary and undesirable regulatory burden by requiring professionals to register with multiple colleges. This submission offers additional insights into the regulation of ABAs and our position.

2. Behavioural Clinicians and their Practice

It is our understanding that ABA providers come from a wide variety of educational and professional backgrounds. Some of these workers would be eligible for registration with the College or with one of the other regulatory colleges in Ontario and some are already regulated.



While only a small number of College members provide ABA services as the sole focus of their practice, the majority of College members use some ABA techniques and provide behavioural therapy as part of their social work or social service work practice. These techniques, many of which fall under the scope of practice of social work and social service work, are used with a broad range of clients, in diverse contexts and settings, including hospitals, family health teams and community health centres, long-term care, rehabilitation centres, addiction and mental health facilities, school boards, children's mental health and treatment centres, preschool programs, services for adults with special needs/developmental challenges, public health, private practice and more.

In addition to the protected titles "Social worker/Registered Social Worker" or "Social Service Worker, Registered Social Service Worker", College members who offer behavioural services and techniques as a primary focus of their practice may also use other titles which are not protected, including "Early Interventionist", "Behavioural Consultant", "Behavioural Clinician" or "Behavioural Therapist".

3. Regulation of Behavioural Clinicians

Regulation of any profession protects the public from harm while providing transparency. Clients and communities served by behavioural clinicians are vulnerable and deserve the protection associated with receiving care and services from a regulated professional. The College fully supports efforts to ensure that behavioural clinicians are subject to oversight through professional regulation, however a significant number of behavioural clinicians are already registered with colleges other than the CPO.

Behavioural clinicians (including those who provide behavioural therapy and use behavioural techniques) who are registered with the College are listed on the College's Online Register, which includes information regarding a member's registration status, discipline history (if any) and employer contact information. This transparency is integral to ensuring public protection and is consistent with other regulated professions.

These members are required to use the protected titles of "Social Worker/Registered Social Worker" or "Social Service Worker/Registered Social Service Worker" in the course of their practice, and are subject to multiple other accountability and quality assurance mechanisms, including currency requirements, participation in the College's Continuing Competence Program and complaints and discipline processes.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Behavioural clinicians and/or those using behavioural techniques who are already registered with another regulatory college should not be required to register with the College of Psychologists of Ontario. This is an unnecessary duplication of oversight efforts which would also place an undue regulatory burden on those professionals.

4. Conclusion

The College shares in the concerns about unregulated behavioural clinicians who do not meet the registration requirements of any of the colleges and who are providing services to vulnerable clients and communities. However, we are confident that the accountability and quality assurance mechanisms that are in place as a result of registration with the College are appropriate and effective for all our members, including behavioural clinicians and those using behavioural techniques. We maintain that requiring



Ontario College of
Social Workers and
Social Service Workers

Ordre des travailleurs
sociaux et des techniciens
en travail social de l'Ontario

250 Bloor Street E.
Suite 1000
Toronto, ON M4W 1E6

Phone: 416-972-9882
Fax: 416-972-1512
ocswssw.org

professionals to register with multiple colleges would duplicate regulatory efforts and place an undue burden on these professionals, while providing no additional measure of public protection.

The College strongly supports inter-college collaboration with respect to the regulation of behavioural clinicians and would welcome opportunities to collaborate with other colleges impacted by the proposed regulatory model as we have done on previous occasions.

RECOMMENDATION #2: That the Ministries continue to engage the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (as well as other impacted colleges) on possible regulatory changes.

Thank you for this opportunity to offer our insights and perspective on this issue. We look forward to other opportunities to engage on the question of ABA regulation and to work collaboratively with the Ministries and the other regulatory colleges whose members would be impacted by an oversight framework for professionals practising in this area.

Sincerely,

Mukesh Kowlessar, RSSW
President

Lise Betteridge, MSW, RSW
Registrar and CEO