



# Professional Practice Guidelines: Collaboration Between Personal Support Workers (PSWs) and Regulated Health Care Professionals (RHPs)

**Effective: January 2026**

**Issued by:**

Ontario Personal Support Workers Association (OPSWA)

Canadian Support Workers Association (CANSWA)

---

## 1. Purpose

These Professional Practice Guidelines establish clear expectations for safe, respectful, and effective collaboration between Personal Support Workers (PSWs) and Regulated Health Care Professionals (RHPs). They support high-quality, coordinated care while clarifying roles, responsibilities, delegation, communication, and accountability within interdisciplinary care teams.

---

## 2. Scope

These guidelines apply to PSWs working in:

- Long-term care homes
- Hospitals
- Retirement homes
- Community and home care
- Congregate living settings
- Adult day programs
- Private and family-directed care environments

They apply whenever a PSW works alongside, under the direction of, or in collaboration with an RHP.

---

**Canadian Support Workers Association/Ontario Personal Support Workers  
Association**

**Copyright ©2010-2026**



### 3. Definitions

**Personal Support Worker (PSW):**

An unregulated health care provider who delivers personal care and support services within their education, training, employer policies, and individualized Plan of Care.

**Regulated Health Care Professional (RHP):**

A health professional regulated under provincial or territorial legislation (for example: RN, RPN/LPN, Physician, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist, Speech-Language Pathologist, Dietitian, Social Worker).

**Delegation:**

The formal transfer of authority by an RHP to a PSW to perform a specific task that is outside the PSW’s usual role, with appropriate training, supervision, and documentation.

---

### 4. Core Principles

PSWs must:

- Work collaboratively and respectfully with all RHPs
  - Practice within scope, training, and competence
  - Prioritize client safety, dignity, and rights
  - Maintain clear communication and accurate documentation
  - Accept and follow lawful and appropriate direction
  - Escalate concerns when care is unsafe, unclear, or outside scope
- 

### 5. Roles and Responsibilities

#### 5.1 Personal Support Worker (PSW)

The PSW is responsible for:

- Following the individualized Plan of Care and employer policies
- Carrying out assigned and delegated tasks only when competent and authorized
- Reporting observations, changes in condition, or concerns promptly to the appropriate RHP
- Seeking clarification when instructions are unclear or outside scope

**Canadian Support Workers Association/Ontario Personal Support Workers Association**

**Copyright ©2010-2026**



- Documenting care accurately, objectively, and in a timely manner
- Maintaining professional boundaries and accountability

PSWs must not:

- Perform controlled acts without proper delegation
- Make clinical assessments or diagnoses
- Alter care plans independently
- Accept delegation without appropriate training, supervision, or support

---

## 5.2 Regulated Health Care Professional (RHP)

The RHP is responsible for:

- Assessing the client and establishing the Plan of Care
- Determining which tasks may be assigned or delegated
- Ensuring the PSW has the education, skill, and competence required
- Providing appropriate supervision, guidance, and evaluation
- Remaining professionally accountable for delegated acts

---

## 6. Communication Standards

PSWs must:

- Use clear, respectful, and timely communication
- Promptly report:
  - Changes in condition
  - Pain, distress, or unusual behaviour
  - Safety concerns or incidents
  - Refusals of care
- Participate in care conferences and team meetings when appropriate
- Follow established reporting pathways (nurse, supervisor, care coordinator)

Poor communication that compromises safety must be escalated immediately.

---



## 7. Delegation and Assignment

PSWs may:

- Perform assigned tasks within their education and job description
- Perform delegated tasks only when:
  - Delegation is clearly communicated
  - Training has been provided
  - Competency has been validated
  - Documentation requirements are met

PSWs must decline delegation when:

- They are not trained or competent
- The task places the client or PSW at risk
- The delegation is unclear, unsafe, or undocumented

Declining delegation must be done professionally and without fear of retaliation.

---

## 8. Professional Conduct and Accountability

PSWs must:

- Demonstrate respect for the expertise and authority of RHPs
- Maintain confidentiality and privacy at all times
- Follow ethical and legal standards
- Report unsafe, unethical, or abusive practices
- Accept feedback and supervision in a professional manner

Failure to collaborate safely may result in:

- Employer disciplinary action
  - Removal from delegated responsibilities
  - Review under OPSWA and CANSWA professional practice and conduct standards
- 

## 9. Conflict Resolution



When conflict arises between a PSW and an RHP:

1. Address concerns respectfully and promptly
2. Seek clarification or mediation through a supervisor or manager
3. Document unresolved concerns factually and objectively
4. Escalate concerns immediately when client safety is at risk

PSWs must never be penalized for raising legitimate safety concerns.

---

## 10. Education and Competency

PSWs are responsible for:

- Maintaining required certifications and credentials
- Participating in continuing education
- Staying informed about scope of practice, delegation requirements, and employer policies

Employers and RHPs must support:

- Orientation and role clarity
  - Ongoing competency evaluation
  - Appropriate supervision and safe staffing practices
- 

## 11. Legal and Ethical Alignment

These Professional Practice Guidelines align with:

- Provincial and territorial health legislation
  - Occupational Health and Safety requirements
  - Employer policies and procedures
  - OPSWA and CANSWA Codes of Conduct and professional expectations
- 

## 12. Review and Compliance

These Professional Practice Guidelines:

**Canadian Support Workers Association/Ontario Personal Support Workers  
Association**

**Copyright ©2010-2026**



- Are effective January 2026
  - Apply to all OPSWA and CANSWA members
  - Will be reviewed every three (3) years or sooner if legislation or regulatory frameworks change
- 

## Key Resources – PSW Collaboration with Regulated Health Care Professionals (2026)

- **Ontario Personal Support Workers Association (OPSWA)**  
PSW Professional Practice Guidelines, Code of Conduct, Scope and Accountability  
[www.opswa.ca](http://www.opswa.ca)
- **Canadian Support Workers Association (CANSWA)**  
National Professional Practice and Ethics Framework  
[www.canswa.ca](http://www.canswa.ca)
- **College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO)**  
Delegation, supervision, and nurse–PSW collaboration guidance  
[www.cno.org](http://www.cno.org)
- **Regulated Health Professions Act (Ontario)**  
Controlled acts and delegation authority  
[www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/91r18](http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/91r18)
- **Fixing Long-Term Care Act, 2021**  
Team-based care and PSW role expectations  
[www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/21f39](http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/21f39)
- **Mosby’s Canadian Textbook for the Support Worker (5th Edition)**  
Teamwork, delegation, professional accountability, and interprofessional collaboration