



Standard of Practice

Mental Health Support for Personal Support Workers (PSWs)**

Purpose

This Standard of Practice establishes expectations for **Personal Support Workers (PSWs)** providing care and support to individuals experiencing **mental health conditions**. It promotes **safe, ethical, trauma-informed, and person-centred care** while clearly defining the **scope, responsibilities, and limitations** of the PSW role.

Scope

This standard applies to PSWs working in:

- Community and home care
- Long-term care (LTC)
- Retirement homes
- Hospitals
- Group homes and supportive housing
- Adult day programs and mental health programs

Guiding Principles

Mental health support provided by PSWs shall be:

- **Person-centred and recovery-oriented**
- **Trauma-informed**
- **Culturally safe and inclusive**
- **Respectful, non-judgmental, and dignified**
- **Collaborative within the care team**
- **Bounded by scope of practice**



Definition

Mental Health Support refers to assisting individuals who experience mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, PTSD, substance-use disorders, neurodivergence, and other psychosocial conditions, while promoting emotional well-being, stability, and independence.

Role of the PSW in Mental Health Care

The PSW provides **supportive, observational, and functional assistance**, not diagnosis or clinical treatment.

PSWs may:

- Provide emotional support and reassurance
- Encourage coping strategies identified in the Plan of Care
- Support daily living activities impacted by mental health symptoms
- Observe and report changes in mood, behaviour, or functioning
- Assist with routine structure and community participation
- Support medication adherence **without administering controlled acts**
- Promote safety, dignity, and autonomy

PSWs shall NOT:

- Diagnose mental illness
- Provide psychotherapy or counselling
- Adjust or recommend medication changes
- Perform controlled acts outside delegation
- Manage crisis situations independently

Professional Responsibilities

1. Respect, Dignity, and Rights

PSWs shall:

- Respect privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent



- Use person-first and recovery-focused language
- Avoid stigmatizing or judgmental attitudes
- Support autonomy and self-determination

2. Trauma-Informed Care

PSWs must:

- Recognize that behaviours may be trauma-based
- Avoid re-traumatization through tone, language, or actions
- Promote emotional and physical safety
- Follow established routines and predictability

3. Observation and Reporting

PSWs are responsible for:

- Monitoring changes in:
 - Mood or affect
 - Behaviour or routines
 - Sleep, appetite, or hygiene
 - Social withdrawal or agitation
 - Expressions of hopelessness or distress
- Reporting concerns promptly to the appropriate supervisor or Regulated Health Professional (RHP)
- Documenting objectively and factually

4. Boundaries and Professional Conduct

PSWs must:

- Maintain clear professional boundaries
- Avoid dual relationships
- Not provide personal advice, counselling, or crisis intervention beyond training
- Redirect clinical concerns to the care team



5. Safety and Risk Awareness

PSWs shall:

- Follow safety plans and crisis protocols in the Plan of Care
- Recognize warning signs of escalation or self-harm
- Never leave a person at risk without following escalation procedures
- Call emergency services **only as directed by policy or immediate risk**

6. Collaboration and Teamwork

PSWs work collaboratively with:

- Nurses and physicians
- Social workers and case managers
- Psychiatrists and mental health clinicians
- Families and caregivers (with consent)

7. Cultural Competence and Inclusion

PSWs shall:

- Respect cultural beliefs, identities, and lived experiences
- Provide inclusive support to diverse populations
- Recognize intersectionality (mental health, disability, trauma, poverty, identity)

8. Documentation

Documentation must be:

- Accurate, objective, and timely
- Free of personal opinions or diagnostic language
- Focused on observed facts and support provided
- Aligned with organizational and legal standards



Education and Competency

PSWs providing mental health support must:

- Have foundational mental health education
- Receive employer-specific training
- Maintain ongoing professional development
- Work only within demonstrated competence

Ethical Accountability

PSWs are accountable to:

- This Standard of Practice
- Their employer's policies
- Provincial and federal legislation
- The professional expectations set by
Ontario Personal Support Workers Association and
Canadian Support Workers Association

Conclusion

Personal Support Workers play a **vital frontline role** in mental health support. By adhering to this Standard of Practice, PSWs help ensure care that is **safe, ethical, respectful, and recovery-focused**, while protecting both the individual receiving care and the professional integrity of the PSW.

Resources

1. **Mental Health Commission of Canada**
Recovery-oriented practice, trauma-informed care frameworks, and national mental health guidelines.
2. **Canadian Mental Health Association**
Mental health education, stigma reduction resources, and community-based supports.
3. **Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety**
Workplace mental health and psychological safety toolkits for healthcare workers.



4. **Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities**
Ontario Personal Support Worker Training Standard and foundational competencies.
5. **Ontario Personal Support Workers Association**
Professional guidance, advocacy, and standards for PSWs.
6. **Canadian Support Workers Association**
National best-practice guidance and professional accountability for support workers.