

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
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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**
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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
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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
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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
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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
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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
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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**
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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)
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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)
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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
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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
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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**
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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.