



# **\*\*Professional Practice Guidelines**

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

## **Purpose**

These Professional Practice Guidelines establish expectations for Personal Support Workers (PSWs) providing care and support to individuals experiencing mental health conditions. They promote safe, ethical, trauma-informed, and person-centred care while clearly defining the scope, responsibilities, and limitations of the PSW role.

## **Scope**

These guidelines apply 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.

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## **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 authorized delegation
- Independently manage crisis situations

## **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

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- Follow established routines and predictability

### **3. Observation and Reporting**

PSWs are responsible for monitoring and reporting changes in:

- Mood or affect
- Behaviour or routines
- Sleep, appetite, or hygiene
- Social withdrawal or agitation
- Expressions of hopelessness or distress

PSWs must:

- Report concerns promptly to supervisors or Regulated Health Professionals (RHPs)
- Document 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 outlined in the Plan of Care
- Recognize warning signs of escalation or self-harm
- Never leave an individual at risk without following escalation procedures
- Contact emergency services only as directed by policy or in cases of immediate risk

### **6. Collaboration and Teamwork**

PSWs work collaboratively with:

- Nurses and physicians
- Social workers and case managers
- Psychiatrists and mental health clinicians

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- 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 between mental health, disability, trauma, poverty, and 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:

- These Professional Practice Guidelines
- Employer policies and procedures
- Provincial and federal legislation
- Professional expectations established by recognized PSW associations



## Conclusion

Personal Support Workers play a vital frontline role in mental health support. By adhering to these Professional Practice Guidelines, PSWs help ensure care that is safe, ethical, respectful, and recovery-oriented, while protecting both individuals receiving care and the professional integrity of the PSW role.

## Resources

1. Mental Health Commission of Canada — Recovery-oriented practice and trauma-informed frameworks
2. Canadian Mental Health Association — Education and stigma reduction resources
3. Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety — Workplace psychological safety tools
4. Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities — Personal Support Worker Training Standard
5. Ontario Personal Support Workers Association — Professional guidance and advocacy
6. Canadian Support Workers Association — National best-practice guidance