

COVID-19 & Social Work Practice - Frequently Asked Questions

This resource has been developed in response to member inquiries. It is a living document and will be updated as needed.

1). I have been approached to provide electronic social work services privately to clients during the COVID-19 pandemic? Am I able to do this? What steps should I take?

The private practice of social work is an area of specialization that has been identified by the profession. Private practice is not an entry level social work position. NLCSW's Private Practice Policy was developed based on best practice guidelines. As per the policy, the criteria for voluntary registration as a private practitioner requires that social workers have an MSW with three or more years of social work experience in the proposed areas of private practice. Social workers practicing privately must be **actively registered as an RSW with the NLCSW and have current professional liability insurance.**

Social workers with a BSW can however legally engage in private practice if they are actively registered as an RSW in the province and have current professional liability insurance. However, as per the NLCSW Standards of Practice for Social Workers in NL, "social workers engage in private practice with appropriate competence, experience, and expertise". One's area of expertise and training should be clearly communicated to the client as part of the informed consent process.

There are many issues that must be considered for those engaging in or thinking about starting a private practice, and the NLCSW Private Practice Resource Guide is a great resource. You can access this document at https://nlasw.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/Private_Practice_Resource_Guide.pdf.

All information pertaining to the delivery of electronic services can be found on the NLCSW website https://nlasw.ca/electronic_social_work_practice_criteria_for_RSW_in_NL. If you are practicing electronically, it is important to ensure that your professional liability insurance policy provides adequate coverage for electronic practice. If your professional liability insurance is through CASW's insurance provider, BMS, electronic social work practice is covered.

2). I am a private practitioner and will be offering electronic social work services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. What should I be considering?

All information pertaining to the delivery of electronic services can be found on the NLCSW website at https://nlasw.ca/electronic_social_work_practice_criteria_for_RSW_in_NL.

If you are practicing electronically, it is important to ensure that your professional liability insurance policy provides adequate coverage for electronic practice. Social workers should also communicate with clients about what technologies they are planning to use, if the client has access to these technologies, plans for temporary suspension of services, and availability of community resources.

As with any service delivery, informed consent with clients is crucial. Therefore, social workers incorporating technology in their service delivery should incorporate this as part of their informed consent process. The NLCSW has an informed consent and documentation self-assessment tool that social workers can use in developing an informed consent template or when integrating this into informed consent discussions with clients. This resource can be accessed on the NLCSW website at <https://nlasw.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/Informed%20Consent%20%26%20Documentaton%20Reflection%20Tools.pdf>

In addition, BMS, the professional liability insurer for social workers through CASW, has created an informed consent template that social workers can modify and use in their practice. This template, along with telehealth resource information for health care professionals can be found on the NLCSW website at https://nlasw.ca/COVID-19_Social_Work_Practice

3). I don't have time to research all the available technologies for the delivery of social work services, can the NLCSW recommend one?

As you can appreciate, there are numerous technology programs available for service delivery and social workers may prefer one that works best for them and for their clientele. Therefore, the NLCSW does not recommend, approve or limit the use of the various technological platforms. Each platform is unique and questions pertaining to client privacy and confidentiality must be considered when choosing the best platform to meet your needs. You might also find it helpful to consult with other social workers in private practice about any technologies they are using or find helpful. Engaging in communication with clients about what technologies they have access to would also be important. BMS, the professional liability insurer for social workers through CASW, has also developed telehealth resource information for health care professionals that can be helpful to review. This information can be accessed on the NLCSW website at https://nlasw.ca/COVID-19_Social_Work_Practice

4). Now that private health care clinics can reopen their physical office spaces, what are some things I need to consider with regards to my private practice?

On June 8, 2020, private health care clinics, including social work private practices, were advised they could reopen in accordance with government guidelines. NLCSW has developed a document which outlines key considerations for private practitioners to consider when exploring the physical reopening of one's office space. As the situation pertaining to COVID-19 is continually evolving, social workers must keep abreast of updates that pertain to their businesses and follow directives from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

5). Should I report if a client discloses to a me that they have been experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 and are choosing not to self-isolate, or if they have been informed to self-isolate and are choosing not to?

While COVID-19 is presenting new challenges to health care professionals in Newfoundland and Labrador, all health care professionals, which includes social workers, should be familiar with and adhere to the Act Respecting the Protection and Promotion of Health. The Act clearly outlines duty to report requirements for health care professionals that meet the criteria outlined in the Act and Orders of the Chief Medical Officer of the province. This legislation can be accessed on the Government of NL website at <https://www.assembly.nl.ca/Legislation/sr/statutes/p37-3.htm>.

When considering duty to report, the following sections from the CASW (2005) Code of Ethics and the NLCSW Standards of Practice are relevant:

CASW (2005) Code of Ethics: Value 5: Confidentiality in Professional Practice notes: "Social workers only disclose confidential information to other parties (including family members) with the informed consent of clients, clients' legally authorized representatives or when required by law or court order. The general expectation that social workers will keep information confidential does not apply when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable and imminent harm to a client or others".

The NLCSW Standards of Practice (Standard 6 - Confidentiality) notes: "Social workers may disclose client information to others without consent when:

- *disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, imminent and foreseeable harm to self or others
- *required by law or a court order
- *in all instances social workers disclose the least amount of confidential information to meet their obligations and protect confidential client information from unreasonable public exposure.

The NLCSW has a wealth of resources on our website to assist social workers navigate ethical dilemmas in practice. It is recommended that social workers consult the relevant documents including the NLCSW Ethical Decision-Making Resource Guide, Standards of Practice for Social Workers in NL, CASW (2005) Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Ethical Practice, along with organizational policies and relevant legislation.

6). Several of my current clients have returned to their homes outside of Newfoundland and Labrador as a result of school and business closures in this province. Can I provide electronic social work services to these clients in their home jurisdiction?

The NLASW Standards of Practice speaks to interjurisdictional practice (Standard 9). As noted in the Standards “Social workers have a responsibility to be aware of interjurisdictional issues when providing therapy or social work services in another jurisdiction.

- a) Social workers who provide social work services across jurisdictions must comply with the regulatory requirements in the jurisdiction in which the social worker resides and the jurisdiction in which the client resides.
- b) Social workers engaged in interjurisdictional practice have the appropriate liability insurance.
- c) Social workers providing services to a client in another jurisdiction, comply with legislation and reporting requirements (i.e., reporting child protection concerns) in that jurisdiction”.

Therefore, currently registered social workers in NL must connect with the social work regulatory bodies in the jurisdiction(s) where the client(s) is now residing to determine what regulatory requirements must be met to provide electronic services within their jurisdictions. See website information for Canadian social work regulatory bodies below.

Social workers should also ensure that they have professional liability insurance which provides adequate coverage for electronic practice across jurisdictions. The Professional Liability Insurer through CASW is BMS. Social workers can access their information from the CASW website at <http://www.casw.bmsgroup.com/>

Clients not wanting to engage in electronic services may benefit from information and referral sources for programs and services within their jurisdiction(s).

All information pertaining to the delivery of electronic services can be found on the NLASW website [https://nlasw.ca/electronic social work practice criteria for RSW in NL](https://nlasw.ca/electronic-social-work-practice-criteria-for-RSW-in-NL).

Canadian Social Work Regulatory Bodies:

- British Columbia College of Social Workers - <http://www.bccollegeofsocialworkers.ca/>
- Alberta College of Social Workers - <https://www.acsw.ab.ca/>
- Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers - <https://www.sasw.ca/>
- Manitoba College of Social Workers - <https://mcsw.ca/>
- Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers <https://www.ocswssw.org/>
- Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec - <https://www1.otstcfq.org/>
- New Brunswick Association of Social Workers - <https://www.nbasw-atsnb.ca/>
- PEI Social Work Registration Board - <http://socialworkpei.ca/>
- Nova Scotia College of Social Workers - <http://nscsw.org/>
- Government of the Northwest Territories – Registrar, Professional Licensing - <https://www.hss.gov.nt.ca/en/services/social-worker-licence>