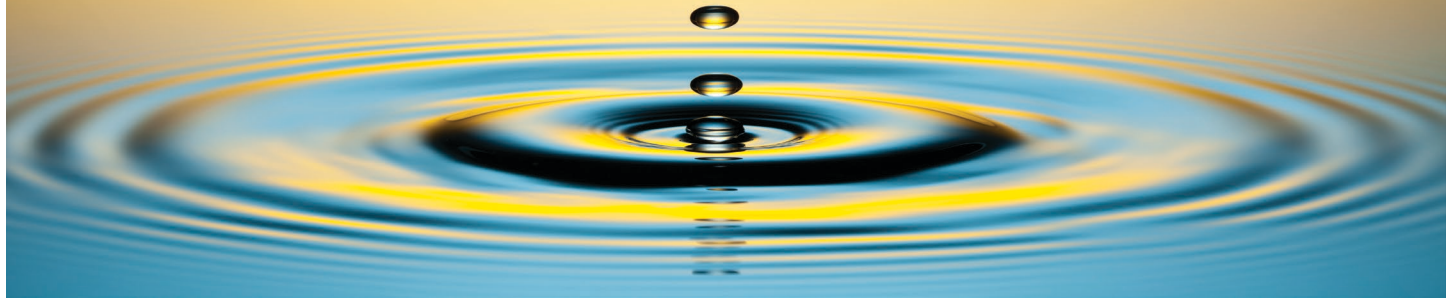


# Practice Matters



*Practice Matters was created as an educational resource for social workers in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is intended that this resource will generate ethical dialogue and enhance critical thinking on issues that impact social work practice. Practice Matters is provided for general information.*

## Linking Regulation, Values and Practice

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Sometimes when registered social workers change employment positions or new graduates enter the workforce, they ask themselves: Do I need to be registered and does registration align with the values of the profession? Anecdotally, it seems that individuals educated in the field of social work ask themselves that question at a rate which is proportionately higher than other regulated professions.

This edition of Practice Matters will explore the practice of social work as a regulated profession and will provide a perspective on this question linking regulation to professional values.

### Regulation

Social work became a regulated profession in Newfoundland and Labrador just over thirty years ago. Prior to the implementation of the *Social Workers Act*, social worker was a position title not a professional title. Employers decided the qualifications of an individual who would be employed as a social worker. While individuals were educated with a Bachelor of Social Work in Newfoundland and Labrador since the early 1970s, there was no legislative requirement to link the employment position with the education.

Even since the *Social Workers Act* and the recognition of social work as a profession, tensions between the terms of professionalism, competence, expertise, and regulation have been expressed.

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) (2005) Code of Ethics guides us to value self-determination, and we believe that clients are the experts in their own lives. It does, however, take knowledge, skill and understanding to support people to be the experts.

A previous edition of Practice Matters titled *The Ethics of Competence* had the following introduction:

*Social work is a diverse and complex profession. Social workers are employed across several fields of practice, within a variety of position descriptions and titles. The scope of the profession is broad, and the legislative definition encompasses a range of activities including direct counselling, administration, policy analysis and research.*

Social work is not one activity in a defined setting. Rather the strength of social work is the many areas where we find social workers contributing to the health and social well-being of the population. Social work practice has a profound impact on members of the public. This is recognized in the growth of regulation and the numbers of practitioners.

## Values

Often the need for registration and the core values of our profession as outlined in the CASW (2005) Code of Ethics are discussed in isolation, however they are inextricably linked. Both the Code of Ethics and professional regulation are concentrated on serving the best interest of the public. This is the reason that the *Social Workers Act* refers to a code of ethics and standards of practice (s.17 (m) & (n)). Each of the core values of the Code has an important link to professional regulation.

### Value 1: Respect for the Inherent Dignity and Worth of Persons

The rights of each person who is served by this profession are at the center of this value. Regulation establishes the standards of practice which guides every interaction we have as professional social workers; ensuring that the rights of clients are primary.

### Value 2: Pursuit of Social Justice

Social justice is at the core of the profession. Early advocates viewed regulation not only as an avenue to advance the profession to align with other allied health professions but as a social justice issue. They questioned why individuals who worked with the most vulnerable and marginalized groups in our society were not required to hold certain knowledge and skills. What did this say about how society viewed many of the groups with which we work? Legislation which recognizes the social work profession recognizes the importance of social justice and the rights of all people.

## Value 3: Service to Humanity

“The social work profession upholds service in the interest of others, consistent with social justice as a core professional objective.” (CASW Code of Ethics, p. 5) “...social workers place professional service before personal goals or advantage”. Regulation emphasizes accountability to this value.

## Value 4: Integrity in Professional Practice

“Social workers maintain a high level of professional conduct by acting responsibly...An essential element of integrity in professional practice is accountability...” (CASW Code of Ethics, p. 6) This value emphasizes acting honestly demonstrating respect for the professions purpose, values, and ethical principles. Regulation is the link between higher level values and how those values are translated to practice by ensuring the delivery of high-quality social work services that meet professional standards.

## Value 5: Confidentiality in Professional Practice

“Social workers respect the importance of the trust and confidence placed in the professional relationship by clients and members of the public” (CASW Code of Ethics, p.7). This trust is central and imbedded not only in our Code of Ethics but in the NLCSW Standards of Practice to ensure that people have access to confidential services and understand the limits to confidentiality through the informed consent process.

## Value 6: Competence in Professional Practice

Social workers respect a client’s right to competent social worker services... Social workers have a responsibility to maintain professional proficiency, to continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills... (CASW Code of Ethics, p.8). This is the core of professional regulation. Realizing that the knowledge gained through social work education and the commitment to lifelong learning as demonstrated through continuing professional education is essential to social work practice.

## Practice

Consider the following scenarios:

Scenario #1: Rory RSW is providing group therapy to clients throughout Canada and is considering the practice implications from a value based and regulatory perspective.

The rights of clients across provincial borders to the same standard of practice and knowledge is rooted in values 1 and 4 of the CASW (2005) Code of Ethics. These values are foundational to

standard 9 of the NLCSW Standards of Practice which addresses key considerations for interjurisdictional practice

[https://nlcsw.ca/sites/default/files/inlinefiles/Standards\\_of\\_Practice\\_for\\_Social\\_Workers\\_in\\_NL.pdf](https://nlcsw.ca/sites/default/files/inlinefiles/Standards_of_Practice_for_Social_Workers_in_NL.pdf) .

These include complying with the regulatory standards in the jurisdiction both where the client and the social worker resides, having appropriate professional liability insurance and understanding the reporting requirements in both areas. Rory consults the frequently asked questions document on the NLCSW website and sees that the recommendation is to follow up with the regulatory bodies where group participants are residing to understand any necessary requirements.

<https://nlcsw.ca/sites/default/files/inline->

[files/Interjurisdictional\\_Social\\_Work\\_Practice\\_FAQ\\_Practice\\_Guideline\\_for\\_NL\\_Social\\_Workers\\_Updated\\_November\\_2022\\_2.pdf](https://nlcsw.ca/sites/default/files/inline-files/Interjurisdictional_Social_Work_Practice_FAQ_Practice_Guideline_for_NL_Social_Workers_Updated_November_2022_2.pdf) This keeps the needs of clients primary regardless of where they reside.

Scenario#2: A recent BSW graduate was discussing their job prospects. They are interested in macro and community practice and are wondering about the link to registration.

They reflected on whether they were beginning a job or practicing a profession. They considered the definition of clients in the CASW (2005) Code of Ethics and the definition of social work in the *Social Workers Act* both of which includes communities. They also reflected on what it means to adhere to a code of ethics which reflects the values of the profession.

## Conclusion

This edition of Practice Matters focused on how the regulation of the practice of social work reflects the core values of the profession respecting the rights of those with whom we work.

## References

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