

16 February 2016

**Psychology Board of Australia**  
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**Re: Public consultation paper 26: Area of practice endorsements**

Dear Board members of the Psychology Board of Australia,

Thank you for the chance to provide feedback and input on the definition of counselling psychology.

As a member of the Association of Counselling Psychologists, I wish to advise that I am in full support of the *revised* competency statements provided to you by the APS College of Counselling Psychologists and the Association of Counselling Psychologists (attached/see below).

These changes reflect more accurate diagnosis, psychopathology, psychopharmacology, assessment and couples work competencies.

I am currently at the end of my Counselling Psychology Master's degree at Curtin University. As such I can comment that the training provided within this course for psychological assessment including the use of assessment tools such as the Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence-IV and the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory -III was the same for those in the Clinical Psychology Master's program.

The placements that I completed (one primary school, a GP clinic through Medicare local and a university service), provided me with exposure and experience in treating a vast array of client presentations and included couples and groups formats. I regularly saw clients with diverse backgrounds, demographics and complex mental health issues. These included (but were not limited to) psychosis, bipolar, schizophrenia, severe suicidality, depression, eating disorders, alcohol and other drug issues, trauma, relationship issues and domestic violence, and personality disorders. Throughout this exposure, case formulation with various models were consistently applied, and DSM-5 based mental health assessment and application of evidence based treatments for these clients was enforced in line with the postgraduate training provided in my degree.

Therefore, it is my opinion that the revised statements more accurately describe the training, research expertise, and practical competencies of counselling psychologists who have undergone this additional postgraduate training and then sought endorsement.

*Kind Regards*

## Competencies required for counselling psychology endorsement

Counselling psychologists use their knowledge and understanding of psychology, psychotherapy, and mental health to treat a wide range of psychological issues, problems, and mental health disorders. They provide assessment, formulation, diagnosis and psychotherapy for individuals, couples, families, and groups across the lifespan. They use evidence-based therapies and evidence-based therapy relationships to assist clients to resolve mental health disorders or psychological problems and move toward greater psychological health. They research, evaluate, and develop new methods for improving psychological health and therapeutic interventions for psychological problems and disorders.

Consumers of the services of counselling psychologists are persons, groups, and organisations, including:

- Members of the public, couples, families, and carers
- Medical, specialists and health practitioners
- Health departments, hospitals and community practices
- Community groups
- National, state or local government or non-government organisations and
- Welfare agencies, educational institutions, justice services, victims of crime, and community services

Specific services of counselling psychologists include **assessment and provision of psychological therapy** for a wide range of issues and disorders including anxiety, depression, **post-traumatic stress disorder**, grief and loss, relationship difficulties, **domestic violence, sexual abuse and trauma**, career development, **substance use disorders, eating disorders, and personality disorders**.

To assure consumers that a counselling psychologist is capable of providing the services required all endorsed practitioners must be competent in areas a-h in this document. All counselling psychologists must be cognisant of the APS Code of Ethics, General Principle 'B.1. Competence' when considering whether they are able to provide a psychological service.

In addition to the generic competencies demonstrated by all registered psychologists, counselling psychologists must have the following specialist skills and possess the following specialist capabilities:

- a) knowledge of the discipline:
  - i) a broad understanding of the role of counselling psychologists in providing psychological services, including assessment, **diagnosis**, treatment, prevention, research and consultancy services within the community across diverse settings
  - ii) knowledge of personality, interpersonal processes, individual differences, gender and identity, emotions and experience, and the cognitions and contexts in which meaning and beliefs arise
  - iii) **knowledge of psychopathology and psychopharmacology**
  - iv) understanding scientific approaches to studying psychotherapy and counselling, including the role of client and therapist factors, and therapeutic alliance, and specific and non-specific treatment processes and
  - v) understanding of the theory and application of evidence based interventions for mental health problems, including **individual** psychotherapy, group, family **and couple** therapy
- b) ethical, legal and professional matters:
  - i) understanding of ethical issues in various counselling psychology settings and how to appropriately manage them (for example, confidentiality and record keeping, managing professional boundaries) and
  - ii) competence in communicating counselling psychologists' ethical obligations to others (for example, to families, government departments)
- c) psychological assessment and measurement:
  - i) **knowledge of psychological assessment, with a critical approach to theory, practice, and research**
  - ii) **competence in psychological assessment and diagnosis of mental disorders using structured clinical approaches**
  - iii) **competence in the assessment of symptom severity using empirically valid and reliable measures**
  - iv) competence in applying measures to evaluate the effectiveness of psychological interventions and

- v) competence in the use of valid and reliable tests of psychological functioning, including learning, intelligence, cognition, **emotion**, memory and personality
- d) intervention strategies:
- i) knowledge of theory and the scientific evidence base for **counselling psychology**
  - ii) competence in the delivery of evidence-based psychological therapies for mental health disorders and problems
  - iii) **Competence in individual, couple, family and group interventions**
- e) research and evaluation:  
competence in each of the following:
- i) identification of psychological questions that arise from counselling psychology practice and the design of appropriate research strategies
  - ii) communication of research methods and findings to non-psychologists in clinical practice settings and
  - iii) the transformation of research and evaluation findings into policy, applied knowledge, and improved treatments
- f) communication and interpersonal relationships:  
competence in each of the following:
- i) provision of expert oral and written reports to various stakeholders, including clients, families and carers, health and medical practitioners, and for medico-legal purposes
  - ii) provision of consultancy advice and psychoeducation about mental health problems and issues
  - iii) communicating the obligations of a counselling psychologist in various roles and settings (for example, to schools, medical practitioners, criminal justice systems) and
- iv) awareness of personal factors as they influence communications between individuals and groups, and the ability to reflect upon interpersonal processes through supervision and peer consultation
- g) working within a cross-cultural context:  
competence to adequately practise with clients from cultures different from the psychologist's own, including specific knowledge and skills in assessment and intervention with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and understanding and showing sensitivity to lifestyle diversity and issues of gender equality, particularly as they relate to counselling psychology contexts and
- h) practice across the lifespan:  
competence with clients in childhood, adolescence, adulthood and late adulthood, as relevant to the work of a counselling psychologist in the context in which the psychologist is employed.