

Manitoba College of Social Workers “Conversion Therapy” Position Statement

The Manitoba College of Social Workers (the College) joins with the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) in its support of Bill C-8 to amend the Criminal Code to ban conversion therapy “in the ongoing pursuit of justice, human rights, and respect for inherent dignity and worth of persons” (CASW, 2020).

In accordance with the Manitoba College of Social Workers values, Code of Ethics (2018) and Standards of Practice (2018), **the College opposes conversion therapy and prohibits social workers from providing any form of social work service involving conversion or reparative therapy.** Conversion therapy contradicts core social work values, ethics and standards of practice and is therefore not approved as a form of social work intervention.

Social workers have a professional obligation to adhere to the Manitoba College of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Members involved with conversion therapy in any form, or under any alternate title, may be subject to investigation and disciplinary action.

Background

Conversion therapy, also known as reparative therapy, involves various interventions intended to alter a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity or expression with the goal of promoting heterosexuality (George, 2017; Bright, 2004, Human Rights Campaign, 2020). Interventions utilized in the context of conversion therapy include many forms of recognized social work practice methods (i.e. behavioural therapy, cognitive therapy). These interventions, done with the purpose of achieving heterosexuality, are unacceptable (Bright, 2004; Christianson, 2005; American Psychological Association, 2009). Conversion therapy, in any form, is not empirically based, supported by reliable data, or considered effective as a form of practice. Conversion therapy is harmful both on an individual and community level (Christianson, 2005; Behrmann & Ravitsky, 2014) and has been found to have negative outcomes including increased self-hatred, decreased self-esteem, difficulty sustaining relationships, sexual dysfunction, isolation, dehumanization, depression, anxiety, self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide (Christianson, 2005; George, 2017; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002; Haldeman, 2001).

Social Workers have a responsibility to support the elimination of the practice of conversion therapy in order to promote a just society. Regardless of the name used for treatment, the College considers any practice carried out with the intention of suppressing or altering a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity or expression and promoting heterosexuality as a form of prohibited conversion therapy.

Members are encouraged to contact the College at 204-888-9477 or info@mcsww.ca for consultation and guidance regarding the scope of social work practice, social work ethics and practice standards.

Manitoba College of Social Workers Code of Ethics (2018)

Value 1: Respect for the Inherent Dignity and Worth of Person

Social work is founded on a long-standing commitment to respect the inherent dignity and individual worth of all persons. When required by law to override a client's wishes, Social Workers take care to use the minimum coercion required. Social Workers recognize and respect the diversity of Canadian society, taking into account the breadth of differences that exist among individuals, families, groups and communities. Social Workers uphold the human rights of individuals and groups as expressed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

Value 2: Pursuit of Social Justice

Social Workers believe in the obligation of people, individually and collectively, to provide resources, services, and opportunities for the overall benefit of humanity and to afford them protection from harm. Social Workers promote social fairness and equitable distribution of resources, and act to reduce barriers and expand choice for all persons, with special regard for those who are marginalized, disadvantaged, vulnerable, and/or have exceptional needs. Social Workers oppose prejudice and discrimination against any person or group of persons, on any grounds, and specifically challenge views and actions that stereotype particular persons or groups.

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. In professional practice, Social Workers balance individual needs, and rights and freedoms with collective interest in the service of humanity. When acting in a professional capacity, Social Workers place professional service before personal goals or advantage and use their power and authority in disciplined and responsible ways that serve society.

Value 4: Integrity in Professional Practice

Social Workers demonstrate respect for the profession's purpose, values and ethical principles relevant to their field of practice. Social Workers maintain a high level of professional conduct by acting honestly and responsibly and promoting the values of the profession. Social Workers strive for impartiality in their professional practice, and refrain from imposing their personal values, views and preferences on clients. It is the responsibility of Social Workers to establish the tenor of their professional relationships with clients and others to whom they have a professional duty, and to maintain professional boundaries. As individuals, Social Workers take care in their actions not to bring the reputation of the profession into disrepute. An essential element of integrity in professional practice is ethical accountability based on this Code of Ethics, the IFSW International Declaration of Ethical Principles of Social Work, and other relevant provincial/territorial standards and guidelines. Where conflicts exist with respect to these sources of ethical guidance, Social Workers are encouraged to seek advice, including consultation with their regulatory body.

Guideline 1 – Ethical Responsibilities to Clients

1.1.1 Social Workers maintain the best interests of clients as a priority, with due regard to the respective interests of others.

1.1.2 Social Workers do not discriminate against any person on the basis of age, abilities, ethnic background, gender, language, marital status, national ancestry, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status.

1.2.2 Social Workers acknowledge diversity within and among individuals, communities, and cultures.

Guideline 2 – Ethical Responsibilities in Professional Relationships

2.2.2 Social Workers do not take unfair advantage of any professional relationship or exploit others to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.

Guideline 4.1 – Professional Practice

4.1.1 Social Workers work toward the best possible standards of service provision and are accountable for their practice.

4.1.3 Social Workers appropriately challenge and work to improve policies, procedures, practice and service provisions that:

- Are not in the best interests of clients
- Are inequitable
- Are in any way oppressive, disempowering or culturally inappropriate; and
- Demonstrate discrimination

Guideline 7 – Ethical Responsibilities to the Profession

7.1.1 Social Workers promote excellence in the social work profession. They engage in discussion about and constructive criticism of, the profession, its theories, methods and practices.

7.1.2 Social Workers uphold the dignity and integrity of the profession and inform their practice from a recognized social work knowledge base.

7.1.8 Social Workers distinguish between actions and statements made as private citizens and actions and statements made as Social Workers, recognizing that Social Workers are obligated to ensure that no outside interest brings the profession into disrepute.

Guideline 8 – Ethical Responsibilities to Society

8.2.1 Social Workers strive to identify, document and advocate for the prevention and elimination of domination or exploitation of, and discrimination against, any person, group or class on the basis of age, abilities, ethnic background, gender, language, marital status, national ancestry, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic status.

Manitoba College of Social Workers Standards of Practice (2018)

Standard 1 – The Professional Relationship

1.1 The best interest of the client will be the primary concern of the Social Workers in providing professional services. Best interests of the client mean that the wishes, desires, motivations and plans of the client are taken by the Social Worker as the primary consideration in any intervention plan developed by the Social Workers. All actions and interventions taken by the Social Worker are subject to the reasonable belief that the client will benefit from the action.

Standard 2 – Professional Competence

2.4 Social workers will ensure that any professional recommendations or opinions that they provide in the course of their practice are appropriately substantiated by evidence and are supported by a credible body of social work knowledge.

Standard 3 – Integrity of Professional Practice

3.4 Social Workers will not discriminate against any person regardless of ethnicity, language, religion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical appearance, physical or mental disability, economic status, political affiliation or national origin.

Manitoba College of Social Workers Amended and Re-stated By-Laws (2020)

Values

1-5 In achieving its vision and mission, the work of the College is based on values of respect, for the equality, worth and dignity of all people, social inclusion, and social justice. The college shall strive to foster practices that reflect diversity.

Resources and Links

American Psychological Association (2009). Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>

Behrmann, J. & Ravitsky, V. (2014). Turning queer villages into ghost towns: A community perspective on conversion therapies. *AJOB Neuroscience*. 5(1), 14-16.

Bright, C. (2004). Deconstructing reparative therapy: An examination of the processes involved when attempting to change sexual orientation. *Clinical Social Work Journal*. 32(4), 471-481.

Canadian Association of Social Workers – CASW (2018). Policy Statement on Conversion/Reparative Therapy for Sexual Orientation. Retrieved from https://www.casw-acts.ca/sites/default/files/documents/CPA_CASW_Conversion_Therapy_Statement.pdf

Canadian Association of Social Workers - CASW (2020). Statement on Bill C-8 – Conversion Therapy. Retrieved from <https://www.casw-acts.ca/en/statement-bill-c-8-conversion-therapy>

Christianson, A. (2005). A re-emergence of reparative therapy. *Contemporary Sexuality*. 39(10), 8-17.

George, M.A. (2017). Expressive ends. Understanding conversion therapy bans. *Alabama Law Review*. 68(3), 793-853. Retrieved from <https://www.law.ua.edu/lawreview/files/2011/07/Expressive-Ends-Understanding-Conversion-Therapy-Bans.pdf>

Haldeman, D. (2001). Therapeutic antidotes: Helping gay and bisexual men recover from conversion therapies. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*. 5(3-4), 117-130.

Human Rights Campaign (2020). The lies and dangers of efforts to change sexual orientation on gender identity. Retrieved from <https://www.hrc.org/resources/the-lies-and-dangers-of-reparative-therapy>

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Manitoba College of Social Workers (2018). Standards of Practice. Retrieved from <https://mcsw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Standards-of-Practice-MAR-2018-WEB-Aug-19.pdf>

New Brunswick Association of Social Workers (2019). Standards Regarding Conversion Therapy. Retrieved from <https://www.nbasw-atsnb.ca/assets/Uploads/Conversion-Therapy-Full-Standards-EN.pdf>

Shidlo, A. & Schroeder, M. (2002). Changing sexual orientation: A consumers' report. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. 33(3), 249-259.

Spitzer, R. (2012). Spitzer reassess his 2003 study of reparative therapy of homosexuality. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*. 41(4), 757.