

Practice Note

What is the regulatory role of the Manitoba College of Social Workers?

Professional regulation is the process of setting and enforcing standards of professional behaviour, competence, and ethics (Pickett, 2017). Professional self-regulation is a regulatory model whereby government delegates regulatory authority to those with the specialized knowledge and in-depth expertise required to regulate their profession. The most common mechanism for delegating regulatory authority is through legislation. In Manitoba that is through the *Social Work Profession Act* which was enacted in April 2015.

There are two essential aspects granted to self-governing organizations: the authority to define registration requirements and the responsibility to evaluate the conduct of its registrants. Regulation upholds the social work value of social justice by protecting the public. The College establishes accountability and public confidence through registrants' adherence to the Manitoba College of Social Workers Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Registration provides the public with assurance that social workers can deliver competent services and regulation provides service participants with a voice to have their concerns heard and guarantee that service users have recourse should harm occur.

Regulation is important as it ensures that social work is practiced by qualified professionals who meet the required qualifications. It ensures that registrants meet a standard of competence that protects the public when services from a Social Worker are being delivered. The public is protected through the maintenance of minimum practice standards, ongoing registration requirements (including continuing competency requirements), and an accountability mechanism, all of which are provided through the MCSW as the social work regulatory body in Manitoba.

Social work in Canada is regulated in all provinces and in the Northwest Territories, with each having a designated regulatory body. In some Canadian jurisdictions, the regulatory body has an integrated mandate, which means that they are both a regulator of social work practice, and a professional association (Rice, 2018; Kourgiantakis et al. 2022). Manitoba has an integrated mandate to both regulate and support the profession, with a primary mandate to protect the public. This is important to understand as it defines the purpose, or objectives of the College.

The objectives of Manitoba College of Social Workers are outlined in The *Social Work Profession Act* (SWPA). These two objectives are fulfilled through the following actions:

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Regulation Activities:

- Professional regulation provides the public with the assurance that Social Workers have the knowledge and skills required for entry to practice.
- The College establishes accountability and public confidence through members' adherence to the Manitoba College of Social Workers Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
- The College has the responsibility to evaluate the conduct of its members in response to public complaints.
- The College has a responsibility to ensure that the title Social Worker, or Registered Social Worker is protected as outlined in legislation. Only Registered Social Workers are entitled to use the designation or represent themselves as a social worker, regardless of whether this is required as a condition of employment. In Manitoba, "unlicensed social workers" do not exist. Completion of social work education does not authorize individuals to represent themselves or use the title social worker. Individuals must be registered with MCSW to use the professional title of social worker in Manitoba.

Support Activities to the Profession:

- Support members' practice through development of and education regarding recognized Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.
- Promote learning and skill development through continuing education opportunities.
- Offer ethical decision-making tools and consultation to members.
- Offer opportunities to become involved in organized reconciliation efforts.
- Advocate for the profession and for social justice both provincially and nationally.
- Educate the public regarding the importance of the social work profession.
- Raise credibility of the profession.
- Provide networking opportunities for members.
- Recognition through awards and education scholarships
- Access to professional liability insurance.

Conclusion

Being a professional social worker is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is a privilege that social workers can self-regulate and set the expectations for the social work profession.

Regulation demonstrates transparency. It sends a message to our service participants that we aspire to provide the most competent and ethical services they deserve.

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References:

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