

**SOCIAL WORKER LICENSING LEGISLATION  
CONSULTATION WORKSHOPS  
SEPTEMBER 2007**

**SUMMARY OF MOST COMMON RESPONSES AND THEMES**

**INTRODUCTION**

During September 2007, Department of Health and Social Services staff traveled throughout the NWT to carry out the following regional consultation workshops:

<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
Hay River	Thursday, September 6, 2007
Fort Smith	Friday September 7, 2007
Norman Wells / Sahtu	Monday, September 10, 2007 (Teleconference from Yellowknife) Wednesday, September 12, 2007
Inuvik / Beaufort Delta	Friday, September 14, 2007 Thursday, September 20, 2007 (Teleconference from Yellowknife)
Fort Simpson	Monday, September 17, 2007
Yellowknife	Tuesday, September 18, 2007 am and pm sessions
Behchoko	Wednesday, September 19, 2007

A total of 76 stakeholders participated in the consultations. Participants included frontline community social workers and community wellness workers, regional social work supervisors, regional managers, NGO staff, and Department Headquarters staff. Participants were asked for their views on a total of six questions. The workshops ran on average 3.5 to 4 hours.

This document presents those responses and themes that were heard most often across regions and workshops. On some issues, the majority of participants seemed to be in agreement as to what should be in the legislation. However on other issues, contrasting themes and responses emerged. This document does not attempt to present direction as to what social worker licensing legislation in the NWT should look like. Rather, the document merely gives an overall summary of most often-heard feedback for each question, whether a consensus emerged or not.

## **RESPONSES AND THEMES**

### **Q. 1 – Is it necessary to include a definition of social work in the legislation? If so, which definition of social work is most appropriate for the NWT?**

There was strong agreement here that a definition of social work is necessary to promote the social work profession and define the social worker's role to add credibility and for public understanding. The majority of those consulted would like to see a broad definition that includes key phrases, such as promoting social change and social equality, principles of social justice, and individual, family, and community development. The need to recognize cultural diversity and have a definition that is unique to circumstances in the North was clearly identified.

- Like New Brunswick definition example, Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work example, and first part of Prince Edward Island example.
  - Prevention of social problems;
  - Development, promotion, and delivery of human service programs;
  - Development and promotion of social policies;
  - Promoting social equality;
  - Promotes social change;
  - Human relationships;
  - Empowerment of people;
  - Intervening at the points where people interact with their environments;
  - Principles of human rights and social justice;
  - To aid clients to resolve personal, family, and social problems; and
  - Work that requires expert and comprehensive knowledge, skills, judgment, and ethical conduct of a distinctly professional nature.
- Don't be too specific in the definition / keep the definition broad.
- Include respect of cultures, cultural diversity in the definition.
- Include social equality, social justice in the definition.
- Include family and community values in the definition.

### **Q. 2 – What minimum registration qualifications should be established to become a registered social worker in the NWT?**

#### **Q.2(a) – What minimum educational requirement should be established to become a registered social worker?**

No consensus was reached on this point. Many argued that a diploma should be the minimum requirement, and the most common reasons presented for this standpoint were that a diploma is what is offered in the NWT at the moment, and that it is enough to do the job of a social worker. Counter to this, many others also argued that a BSW should be the minimum, most often noting that the NWT needs to follow the national standard minimum requirement, and that requiring a BSW would promote professional social work education in the North.

- Have diploma as the minimum requirement, as this is the only social work education in the NWT.

- If require diploma now, could have BSW as the standard in the future.
- Have BSW as the minimum requirement to promote education and promote the profession in the future.
- Go with the national standard for the minimum requirement, which is a BSW.
- If go with BSW as the minimum requirement, the GNWT needs to offer support to enable NWT residents to get their BSWs.
- Issue is complicated by current job requirements versus registration requirements.
- Not as simple as just having an education – experience, continuing education, and a definition of social work are important.

**Q.2(b) – Should grandparenting clauses be included? If so, what grandparenting clauses should be included in the Act?**

There was consensus on this issue, in terms of preferences as well as constraints. Most participants noted their preference that grandparenting should be permanent for those with a lot of experience in the field, but temporary for those new to the field. However, participants also recognized that there are administrative difficulties associated with temporary grandparenting, and felt that temporary grandparenting would only be feasible if the GNWT were to provide monetary and non-monetary support to those required to upgrade their qualifications. Capacity issues were recognized, specifically the ability to fill those positions of people away from the job while upgrading, and the availability of educational opportunities.

- Do permanent grandparenting for those with lots of experience; do temporary grandparenting for those new to the field.
- Only do temporary grandparenting if the GNWT will provide support to social workers to upgrade their education (leave and financial support).
- Temporary grandparenting is too complicated and administratively difficult, and so not feasible for the regulatory body, therefore do permanent grandparenting.

**Q.2(c) – Should there be an experiential requirement to register?**

There was strong agreement here that no experiential requirement is necessary. Most felt that the practicum completed as part of one's formal social work education would be sufficient in fulfilling a practical requirement for having some social work field experience before being able to be recognized as a social worker. As practicum hours are required as part of diploma and degree social work programs, this practical requirement for experience would already be covered by a minimum education requirement in the legislation, and no additional experiential requirement would be necessary.

- Do not have an experiential requirement, as the practicum requirement that is part of social work education is sufficient. / Experience is important, but this does not need to be a legislated requirement, as already covered by practicum that is part of social work education. / Need to trust that practicum included in social work education is sufficient.
- Practicum must be relevant to be considered experience.
- Mentorship is a possible solution.

#### **Q.2(d) – Should there be a specific requirement for continuing competency?**

There was strong support from participants on having a continuing competency requirement for the profession. However, most recognized that this too would need GNWT support in order to be feasible, and preferred that this continuing competency requirement be set in a way that would make it easy to adjust, perhaps by having it set in regulations, regulatory body bylaws, standards of practice, or a code of ethics.

- Continuing competency keeps the profession up to date. / Training is always a good thing.
- Social workers would need support from the GNWT to do continuing competency. / The Department needs to take an active role. / Is there the capacity to require this?
- It would be good to require continuing competency, perhaps 40 hours per year.
- Should have the requirement for continuing competency addressed in a way that would allow the requirement to be easily adjusted.

#### **Q. 3 – If social workers are regulated in the NWT, who should administer their regulations and issue licenses?**

There was not unanimous support for just one regulatory body model, however key themes did emerge that clearly describe social workers' concerns and preferences in regards to who should administer their legislation. Most social workers were apprehensive about letting the Department alone make all the decisions as to licensing and discipline. However, at the same time, most were not confident about giving the regulatory role entirely to the Association of Social Workers in Northern Canada. Overall, most noted their satisfaction with having either the Committee model or the Compromise model.

- Social workers do not want the Department making the decisions.
- We cannot count on the Association.
- The Committee and Compromise models are most popular.
- The Department can provide the administrative support and do straightforward licensing, but should not take the lead on discipline.
- If go with the Committee model, the Association could still be consulted when it comes to dealing with discipline and choosing Committee members.
- Want to ensure advocacy for the profession survives after regulation.
- Need to consider issues related to public involvement.

#### **Q. 4 – Is there any reason why the discipline process in the Pharmacy Act 2006 would not be suitable for the social work profession?**

There was clear agreement here that social workers need to be involved in the discipline of their profession. Those involved should have knowledge of the social work practice in the North, but would not necessarily have to be from within the NWT. Public involvement would be necessary for the profession to appear accountable to the public,

and whatever processes are put in place should be set up in a way to ensure any conflict of interest could be avoided when dealing with specific cases.

- Social workers should take the lead in discipline, with public involvement / involvement of members of the community.
- Social workers from the North, not just the NWT, could be involved / the social workers involved need to understand the practice of social work in the North.
- The social workers involved in a specific complaint should not be from the same region as the social worker the complaint is against. / Must ensure there is never a conflict of interest.

#### **Q. 5 – Which regulatory model will suit the NWT best?**

There was strong consensus here that preferably the legislation should incorporate a combined Exclusive Scope – Right to Title model, in order to best promote the profession while at the same time protect the public. The majority also recognized that in order to do this, exemption clauses might need to be added into the legislation, to ensure others in the community with perhaps overlapping professional duties could still perform these duties (such as elders or clergy who do some type of counseling).

- First preference is for combining the Exclusive Scope and Right to Title models, seconded by having just the Exclusive Scope model.
- The legislation should have exemption clauses to ensure others in the community can still do parts of their jobs that may fall under social work practice.
- Exclusive Scope model brings clarity to the profession and the profession needs an identity.
- Risk of just doing Right to Title model is less protection for the public.

#### **Q. 6 – Equivalency Provisions?**

There was clear agreement on all aspects of this point. As far as addressing international equivalencies, direction on this should come from the Canadian Association of Social Workers. Otherwise, in order to be registered as a social worker, a candidate should be required to have completed a social work education program, no matter what the formal title of the program is. Other educational streams, such as psychology and sociology, should not be sufficient to fulfill the social work minimum education requirement.

- The legislation should allow that any program of social work be acceptable, for example the Bachelor of Indian Social Work.
- Should look to National Association for direction on accepting / not accepting international equivalencies.
- Should not accept psychology or sociology backgrounds as equivalent. / Social work is different from psychology or sociology, and want to keep the social work profession clear.

## **EVALUATION OF WORKSHOPS**

Evaluations of the workshops came back positive. Most respondents felt the workshops were beneficial and were glad of the opportunity to voice their input on the topic of possible future social worker licensing legislation. Many commented that they had not realized beforehand just how many options there were or decisions that needed to be made in regards to regulation. One common suggestion for possible improvement to the workshops was structuring in more time to better cover the background of the various issues and options, and to allow for further discussion on some of the more key issues.

In response, all participants and NWT social workers will be given further opportunity to provide additional feedback through telephone follow-ups, email, or web form, until October 31, 2007.