



CANADIAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
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INCREASING ACCESS, REDUCING COSTS AND IMPROVING OUTCOMES...

MAXIMIZING PSYCHOLOGISTS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO CANADA'S PUBLICLY FUNDED HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS

A Position Statement of the Canadian Psychological Association

Approved by the CPA Board of Directors - March 12, 2026

Prepared by:

Lesley Graff, Ph.D., C. Psych

Sean Kidd, Ph.D., C. Psych

Giuseppe Alfonsi, Ph.D.

Gordon Asmundson, Ph.D., R. Psych

Jacque Cohen, Ph.D., R. Psych

Stephanie Greenham, Ph.D., C. Psych

Sara Hagstrom, Ph.D., C. Psych

Lana Hawkins, Ph.D., R. Psych

Lesley Lutes, Ph.D., R. Psych

Aiden O'Callahan, M.A.

Jennifer Russell, Ph.D., R. Psych

Joanne Savoie, Ph.D., L. Psych

Jo Ann Unger, Ph.D., C. Psych



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ABOUT THE CPA

The Canadian Psychological Association is the national voice for the science, practice and education of psychology in the service of the health and welfare of Canadians. The CPA is Canada's largest association for psychology and represents psychologists in public and private practice, university educators and researchers, as well as students. Psychologists are the country's largest group of regulated and specialized mental health providers, making our profession a key resource for the mental health needs of Canadians. The CPA is the national accrediting body for professional training programs of psychology in all provinces and territories.

VISION

The CPA envisions a society that values and applies psychological science for the benefit of persons, communities, organizations and peoples.

MISSION

We will serve the public and the CPA's membership by advancing psychological science, practice and education through research, advocacy and collaboration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the development of this position paper, the task force would like to extend its sincere thanks and appreciation to Glenn Brimacombe (CPA Director, Policy and Public Affairs) and Dr. Stewart Madon (CPA Director, Professional Affairs). Both played an important role in supporting, and contributing to, the discussions and decisions of the task force. Note that the affiliation of each task force member is listed in Appendix 1.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While most governments are working to improve and expand publicly funded access to mental health and psychological services, there is a growing public consensus that they are not moving nearly fast enough in terms of the level of funding, the expansion of delivery models and the supply of mental health providers. Clearly, much more needs to be done.

Now, more than ever, it is critical that federal, provincial and territorial governments accelerate the pace of their mental health investments to ensure that those in need can get the care they require and deserve, when they need it. The cost of delayed action is significant, with continued suffering at the individual, family, and community level, as well as the growing economic cost of mental health which is in the billions annually.

The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) strongly affirms that psychologists are an essential and underutilized clinical resource that must be part of any contemporary, high functioning, and sustainable public health care system. Psychologists are the only specialized regulated mental health professionals, outside of physicians, with broad and independent authority to diagnose and treat mental health disorders including addictions, across all jurisdictions.

Psychologists are uniquely and intensively trained for a number of diverse roles to address patient and population health care needs; providing evidence-based services that range from generalist to specialist advanced practice care for those experiencing severe and complex mental illnesses, developmental disorders, and complex medical conditions requiring psychological assessment and/or intervention. Psychologists contribute across the full continuum of care, from early intervention in primary care and community-based settings to acute and tertiary services in hospitals, significantly contributing to building capacity within and across an integrated health system. Collectively, psychologists are an essential resource for the mental health system and overall health of the people of Canada.

Despite this, only a small proportion of psychologists are practicing in Canada's publicly funded health care systems, leaving most Canadians without access to their expertise. To better meet the growing health and mental health needs of the population, health care systems need to be more responsive in terms of **retaining** the significant expertise and experience of psychologists in hospitals, primary care and community-based settings, **recruiting** psychologists into these settings, and **training** a new generation of these regulated mental health specialists.

Given the well-established scientific evidence for clinically effective psychological care, the CPA urgently calls on decision makers to accelerate the pace of system innovation which must include engaging and expanding the number of psychologists within our publicly funded health care systems.

More specifically, there is a significant and untapped potential that psychologists can play in improving and expanding timely access to cost-effective, evidence-based psychological and mental health care services in Canada. This can be done by more fully engaging psychologists in our publicly funded health systems through more robust recruitment and retention approaches.

With the objective of ensuring that the people of Canada receive cost-effective, evidence-based psychological services in a timely way within our publicly funded health care systems, the CPA recommends:

1. That provincial and territorial governments, health authorities, hospitals, primary care and community-based organizations recognize and leverage the value psychologists bring to health services, particularly when they work within well-functioning environments that utilize their unique training and specialist expertise by: (a) enabling autonomous decision-making within their full scope of practice; and (b) engaging them as leaders who enhance the capabilities of interdisciplinary teams through specialized knowledge in assessment, differential diagnosis, and psychotherapy from general to advanced levels of practice to address complexity, rehabilitation, program development, and research innovation and evaluation.

Psychologists are an undervalued and underutilized resource within our public health systems and this needs to change.

Given the evident capacity challenges health systems are facing overall, and will continue to face for the foreseeable future at all levels (hospital, primary care and community-based care) coupled with the challenge of limited or reduced access to mental health care services, it is essential that psychologists are more fully engaged in public health systems and have the opportunity to practice to their full scope of practice. This not only serves the health care systems more effectively, it strengthens professional satisfaction which facilitates retention.

Full scope of practice relates to the autonomous decision making in clinical assessments, differential diagnosis, and provision of evidence-based psychological treatments. It also incorporates utilization of psychologists' depth of research skills to develop and evaluate innovations in clinical care and service delivery and leveraging psychologists' specialist expertise for team consultation and to build capacity of other health care providers

The scope and expertise of psychologists improves clinical outcomes in a broad range of service delivery contexts, from mental health programs (e.g., inpatient psychiatry units, eating disorders programs, occupational stress injury programs, bipolar disorder clinics, anxiety clinics, early psychosis programs, flexible assertive community treatment [FACT] teams) to medical programs (e.g., bariatric surgery teams, cardiovascular health teams, sleep disorder teams) to rehabilitation programs (e.g., acquired brain injury programs, stroke recovery).

There are opportunities to expand health system capacity by optimising the use of psychologists as experts in psychological therapies, and to train other providers in the mental health workforce to effectively deliver structured, evidence-based therapies for common mental health problems, facilitating a faster scaling up of access to effective treatments.

Public health systems that protect time for these activities not only improve psychologist retention but also achieve a greater return-on-investment, as each psychologist's specialized knowledge reaches more patients through the clinicians they train and programs they develop. Further, there are opportunities to leverage psychologists' extensive research training to measure and evaluate key performance indicators and improve service delivery and health outcomes at a system level.

Noting the overlapping and complementary competencies with psychiatrists in mental health practice, psychologists are well-positioned to assess and triage patients referred for diagnosis, and provide targeted therapies, often first-line, for moderate and severe clinical presentations, reducing wait times in psychiatric patient flow.

Finally, psychologists play a critical integrative role across the health care system. Their expertise drives quality improvement, measurement-based care, implementation science and program evaluation, roles that are central to advancing health system innovation. They serve as consultative resources for primary care teams and community programs, helping to align care across the continuum and strengthen clinical pathways. They expand system capacity by training and supervising psychology trainees and interdisciplinary colleagues. For these reasons, psychologists in hospitals must be recognized not only as clinical specialists but as system-level assets essential to health system transformation.

Actualizing these opportunities are predicated on addressing key system barriers: (1) insufficient number of funded psychologist positions; (2) challenges to attract or retain psychologists in the public health care systems due to remuneration disparities; (3) inconsistent integration into interdisciplinary teams; and (4) underutilization of the capacity and potential of psychologists. Left unaddressed, psychologist engagement in the publicly-funded health system will not turn around, placing additional strain on primary care physicians and psychiatrists, and lengthening unnecessary delays for patients who would benefit from timely care.

2. That provincial and territorial governments, health authorities, hospitals, primary care and community-based organizations improve practice conditions and infrastructure to retain psychologists in the workplace and optimize the return-on-investment in psychological services, ensuring that evidence-based interventions achieve their full cost-saving and outcome-improving potential.

Given the significant concerns that exist about the current and projected shortages of health care professionals, including psychologists, it is essential that governments invest in our most important health care assets, people. Framed under the rubric of conditions of work in the public health care systems, there are a number of related dimensions that need to be addressed to effectively engage and support psychologists in the public sector. These include:

- **Organizational culture:** When enabled to work to their full scope of practice, psychologists, as a specialist trained health profession, can provide autonomous diagnostic and treatment services, as well as consultation to expand clinical reach, and capacity-building to strengthen workforce skills overall. An organizational culture which values psychologists' professional strengths and ensures resources and infrastructure to optimize clinical care will serve to attract psychologists to work in this public sector environment. As an example, psychologists, similar to physicians, struggle to maximize time in clinical care given their significant administrative burden, and would benefit from streamlined administrative demands, sufficient administrative support, and access to tools which improve efficient clinical documentation.
- **Opportunities for advancement:** Psychologists can provide leadership in, and development and evaluation of, clinical services, offering new models of care, initiating clinical innovations, and evaluating system performance, when given the opportunities and support to do so. These opportunities offer creativity and flexibility which can be attractive to established psychologists and provide clear benefit for the health system as well. There are excellent examples where psychologists have played a leadership role in the design, implementation, training and evaluation of a new model of care, including the Ontario Structured Psychotherapy program, British Columbia's Cognitive Remediation Training Advanced Practice program, and Manitoba's Return to Sleep program.
- **Fair and reasonable compensation:** Remuneration for doctoral-trained clinical psychologists in the public health system is well below other doctoral-trained health or medical professionals despite parallel years of training and scopes of practice. The disparity is even more pronounced when

comparing earnings in the private sector versus the public sector, noting that net earnings are commonly more than double for psychologists in the private sector. For the public health care systems to attract and retain a larger number of psychologists, there needs to be a commitment to equity within the public health systems, and to narrow the gap between the public and private sectors.

Fair compensation can play a critical role in the initial recruitment and long-term retention of psychologists in our public health care systems. Recent data identifies that the vacancy rates for psychologists across a number of Canadian hospitals and health regions have worsened, increasing by twenty to forty percent or more in some jurisdictions. Health systems across the country are using aggressive recruitment incentives for physicians, and only recently have been introducing some modest incentives for recruiting and retaining psychologists.

For psychology, the gap between what can be earned in the public sector versus the private sector is pronounced. As a consequence, more psychologists are considering leaving or have left the public sector. For governments to ensure there is capacity to provide timely psychological care for the public, it is critical that psychologists be competitively compensated for the work they do.

3. That provincial and territorial governments, with support from the federal government, increase psychologists' training and infrastructure capacity to meet population need. The number of training seats for psychologists has not kept up with population growth or health needs. It will be important for provincial and territorial governments to increase investments in doctoral and residency training programs to increase the supply of graduating psychologists who will practice in the public health care systems. This will include ensuring that hospitals, primary care clinics and community-based organizations have the capacity and infrastructure to provide clinical training experiences and leverage early exposure in order to attract employment post-graduation. This also includes ensuring that accredited psychology training programs have the resources (i.e., faculty and infrastructure) to train expanded cohorts of psychologists.

Doctorate of Psychology (PsyD) programs offer an accelerated training path, with 30% reduction in training time (i.e., 5 years vs. 7 years post-baccalaureate) through a focused professional curriculum to establish core clinical competencies while maintaining essential breadth of training for specialized services. This Professional School of Psychology model, offered in parallel with the clinician scientist or scientist practitioner (PhD) doctoral training programs, leverages existing academic infrastructure and provides an innovative approach for increasing the supply of psychologists.

With the recent announcement by the federal government to create a \$5 billion Health Infrastructure Fund, the CPA believes there are opportunities for both levels of government to collaborate with a critical leadership role to be played by the provincial/territorial Ministries of Health and Education.

4. That provincial and territorial governments, health authorities, hospitals, primary care and community-based organizations identify opportunities to continue to integrate psychological research to drive quality improvement, access, cost-effective outcomes and accountability. Psychologists, particularly doctoral-trained, receive more extensive training in research than any other regulated discipline in health care. This depth of training uniquely positions psychologists to: (a) synthesize and apply the current evidence across a range of care settings and levels of patient complexity, ensuring that diagnoses are accurate and the delivery of care is up-to-date and most effective; (b) lead and apply sound research and evaluation programs to ensure

that the care provided is effective, efficient, culturally relevant and accessible, and will maximize safety, quality, efficiency and accountability in a fixed resource environment; and (c) communicate research and evaluation findings to government, system leaders and the public to improve awareness about key policy issues, clinical practice and overall system performance.

5. That the provincial and territorial psychological associations, supported by the Canadian Psychological Association, increase awareness of the roles and beneficial impact that psychologists have on individual and system-level outcomes within public health care systems including but not limited to: (a) assessment, diagnosis and intervention to prevent, reduce the impact of, and/or facilitate recovery from mental health disorders, developmental disorders and addictions; (b) addressing the psychological components that prevent illness, improve outcomes for medical disease and injury, and promote health, wellness and behaviour change; and (c) working within integrated health care services to improve access and outcomes.

Given that the organization, management, funding and delivery of health care services largely falls under the purview of the provinces and territories, noting the exception of federally defined populations, there is a significant leadership role for the provincial and territorial psychological associations to play, supported by the CPA, in terms of engaging governments, including the relevant Ministers, Deputy Ministers, senior political staff, and senior government officials, and the senior leadership of health organizations including hospitals, health authorities, primary care and community-based health agencies on a range of policy issues.

A key component of this engagement is to ensure that these decision maker groups have a clear understanding of the role, beneficial impact and potential that psychologists bring to our health care systems. At the same time, there is an opportunity and need for the psychological associations to provide leadership to engage and educate the public and media about the scope of the role and the beneficial impact of psychologists. Complementing this leadership, the CPA will continue to ensure that the voice of psychology is heard by the federal government and its related agencies.

In closing, the objectives of this report are threefold: (1) to ensure that a greater number of decision makers and the public have a deeper understanding of the roles and beneficial impact of psychologists within our public health care systems; (2) to identify forward-looking policy solutions that engage and enable psychologists to practice in these settings to their full scope of practice and provide cost-effective, culturally appropriate, evidence-based care to the greatest number of the people of Canada who are in need of assessment, diagnosis and treatment; and (3) to provide a framework for publicly funded health organizations where the expertise and experience of psychologists can shape and contribute to meaningful change.

Psychologists have much to offer to address health system capacity challenges and the ongoing mental health crisis. Psychologists provide significant public benefit delivering cost-effective, evidence-based care which alleviates suffering, improves health, creates significant efficiencies in health care, and fosters a healthier and more productive society. Psychologists are a highly collaborative health profession and are under the stewardship of governments, health authorities, hospitals, and primary care and community-based organizations when working in the publicly funded health care system.

Knowing that much of the continued conversations about accelerating the pace of mental health system transformation will unfold at the provincial and territorial level, the CPA welcomes the opportunity to meet with governments and health system leaders and looks forward to supporting the provincial and territorial psychological associations as they further their policy conversations and actions.

APPENDIX 1

TASK FORCE MEMBER AFFILIATIONS

Lesley Graff, Ph.D., C.Psych. Co-Chair, Task Force on Health Sector Psychologists. Provincial Medical Specialty Lead - Clinical Health Psychology, Shared Health and Head, Department of Clinical Health Psychology, University of Manitoba - Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Sean Kidd, Ph.D., C.Psych. Co-Chair, Task Force on Health Sector Psychologists. Senior Scientist, Co-Director – Institute for Mental Health Policy Research and Past Division Chief – Psychology. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) – Toronto, Ontario.

Giuseppe Alfonsi, Ph.D. Chief Adult Sites, Department of Psychology, Montreal University Health Centre (MUHC) – Montreal Quebec.

Gordon Asmundson, Ph.D., R. Psych. Professor and Head, Department of Psychology, University of Regina – Regina, Saskatchewan.

Jacquie Cohen, Ph.D., R. Psych. Provincial Leader of Training and Education, Mental Health and Addictions, Nova Scotia Health – Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Stephanie Greenham, Ph.D., C. Psych. Inpatient Mental Health Clinical Lead and Professional Practice Leader for Psychology. Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) – Ottawa, Ontario.

Sara Hagstrom, Ph.D., C. Psych. Director of Training for the Northern Ontario Psychology Internship Consortium (NORPIC), and Regional Clinical and Training Lead for Northwestern Ontario (St. Joseph’s Care Group) for the Ontario Structured Psychotherapy (OSP) Program – Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Lana Hawkins, Ph.D., R. Psych. Senior Practice Lead and Provincial Practice Director, Psychology, Alberta Health Services (AHS) – Edmonton, Alberta.

Lesley Lutes, Ph.D., R. Psych. Professor, Director of Clinical Training, Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia Okanagan Campus – Kelowna, British Columbia.

Aiden O’Callahan, M.A. CPA Section on Psychologists in Hospitals and Health Centres graduate student representative – Kelowna, British Columbia.

Jennifer Russell, Ph.D., R. Psych. Practice Lead for Mental Health and Substance Use, Strategic Clinical Health, Island Health – Vancouver Island, British Columbia.

Joanne Savoie, Ph.D., L. Psych. Director of Training at the Stan Cassidy Rehabilitation Centre – Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Jo Ann Unger, Ph.D., C. Psych. Council of Professional Associations of Psychologists (CPAP) representative. Advocacy Director, Manitoba Psychological Society (MPS). Section Head and Clinical Lead, Child and Adolescent Psychology, Clinical Health Psychology, Shared Health – Winnipeg, Manitoba.