



Psychotherapy & Counselling
Federation of Australia

PACFA Mental Health Practitioner Competencies

The following Competencies have been adopted by PACFA for the purpose of registration of Mental Health Practitioners. These competencies are based on the National Practice Standards for the Mental Health Workforce developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (2002).

1. Rights, Responsibilities, Safety and Privacy

Mental Health Practitioners

1.1 Comply with relevant Federal, State and Territory legislation in relation to the human rights of people with mental health problems and disorders, safety, privacy, child protection, domestic violence and elder abuse reporting, confidentiality, guardianship and anti-discrimination.

1.2 Comply with mechanisms for involuntary treatment and care according to State and Territory mental health legislation, as well as legislation related to informed consent and refusal of treatment.

1.3 Apply guidelines for the management of anger, self-harm, violence and aggression developed at national, State, Territory and local levels.

2. Client and Carer Participation

Mental Health Practitioners

2.1 Apply the principles of self-determination to assist clients, their families and carers in the recovery process, and provide relevant information and resources on mental health.

2.2 Demonstrate awareness of the special needs of children with parents with mental health problems or disorders.

2.2 Establish and maintain caring relationships with clients, their families and/or carers, and support them through the mental health system.

3. Awareness of Diversity

Mental Health Practitioners

- 3.1 Recognise the special needs of children, young people and those with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 3.2 Acknowledge and accept diversity in the social, cultural and spiritual values of clients, families and carers.
- 3.3 Respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of health and well-being and recognise the influence of social, cultural and linguistic factors on health.
- 3.4 Demonstrate awareness of historical and contemporary concerns for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in relation to confidentiality, rights, autonomy and safety.
- 3.5 Show linguistic and cultural sensitivity when communicating with clients, their families and carers.

4. Mental Health Problems and Mental Disorders

Mental Health Practitioners

4.1 Critically appraise and apply a professional knowledge base in mental health, including the following psychological strategies:

- Psycho-education including Motivational Interviewing;
- Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy;
- Relaxation strategies including progressive muscle relaxation and controlled breathing;
- Skills training including problem-solving skills;
- Anger management;
- Social skills and communications training, stress management, and parent-child management;
- Interpersonal Therapy, especially for depression; and
- Narrative Therapy.

4.2 Identify signs and symptoms of mental health problems and disorders, including concurrent conditions, based on current systems for the classification of mental health disorders, and make referrals where appropriate.

4.3 Work as key members of mental health teams.

4.4 Contribute to the development of treatment plans and ongoing clinical care through a focus on the biopsychosocial needs of clients, families and carers, and by fostering wellbeing and enhancing resilience.

5. Promotion and Prevention

Mental Health Practitioners

5.1 Identify behaviours in groups and individuals that increase the risk of mental health problems and disorders, and promote protective factors such as healthy social networks.

5.2 Use community education activities to promote mental health and wellbeing in communities across all age groups, and reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems and disorders.

5.3 Work with relevant groups, agencies and other health professionals to reduce the risk of suicide and self-harming behaviours.

6. Early Detection and Intervention

Mental Health Practitioners

6.1 Recognise the importance of early intervention in the treatment of mental health problems and disorders to reduce the length of time for recovery and risk of recurrence.

6.2 Have a sound knowledge and understanding of the application of evidence-based interventions to stabilise symptoms and maintain client autonomy.

6.3 Refer clients when needed to consumer and carer advocates, interpreters, bilingual counsellors and Indigenous mental health workers.

7. Assessment, Treatment, Relapse Prevention and Support

Mental Health Practitioners

7.1 Use respect and empathy to involve consumers, families and carers in comprehensive assessment and treatment planning, and ensure that the needs of children are included in case plans.

7.2 Provide evidence-based interventions such as crisis intervention and problem solving to prevent the recurrence of symptoms and reduce the risk of suicide and self-harm.

7.3 Demonstrate awareness of the limits of their counselling and psychotherapy skills and make appropriate referrals to specialist health professionals.

7.4 Apply relapse prevention strategies to assist clients manage their symptoms and reduce the risk of further episodes of mental health problems and disorders.

8. Integration and Partnership

Mental Health Practitioners

8.1 Develop and maintain partnerships with other service providers and relevant community groups and organisations to provide clients, their families and carers with integrated care.

8.2 Make appropriate referrals to consumer and carer networks, support groups, primary health care services such as GPs, emergency services such as hospitals and crisis mental health services, and housing and welfare services.

9. Service Planning, Development and Management

Mental Health Practitioners

9.1 Demonstrate a sound knowledge of Mental Health policy, plans and services at National, State and Territory and local levels.

9.2 Understand the processes for the development, implementation, integration and review of mental health services and their relationship with other health and welfare services.

9.3 Manage services effectively and efficiently, support new staff and students on placement, and conduct evaluations to improve mental health services.

9.4 Seek the involvement of clients, families and carers and representatives of diverse cultural groups in planning and evaluation, and communicate outcomes effectively with stakeholders.

10. Documentation and Information Systems

Mental Health Practitioners

10.1 Maintain high quality records for all client contact that are factual, sequential and consistent with professional, organisational and legislative requirements.

10.3 Make appropriate use of information systems and data collection systems to ensure the reliability and validity of client records, timeliness in reporting and continuity of care when working in a team.

10.3 Ensure that clients are fully aware of their rights in relation to collection of data (including FOI), collect only clinically relevant data and ensure that client privacy and confidentiality are maintained.

11. Evaluation and Research

Mental Health Practitioners

11.1 Keep up to date with relevant Mental Health research and apply national guidelines and evidence to improve clinical practice.

11.2 Demonstrate awareness of research ethical guidelines and evaluation and research methods.

12. Ethical Practice and Professional Responsibilities

Mental Health Practitioners

12.1 Observe ethical guidelines, legal requirements and standards of practice, including informed consent, confidentiality, and reporting child and elder abuse.

12.2 Participate in career and professional development opportunities, including supervision of practice, to ensure that knowledge and skills are current.