

Federal Election 2022 Statement

PACFA is Australia's premier peak body for counsellors and psychotherapists, with the highest Training Standards for membership in the country.

PACFA advocates for greater access to counselling and psychotherapy services to support members of the community who have mental health concerns.

Registered counsellors and psychotherapists present an under-utilised, high-value, highly skilled workforce that is ready to meet workforce shortages and gaps. PACFA has welcomed the recommendation of the Select Committee into Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of minimum national standards for the counselling and psychotherapy profession.

In addition to our standards for membership, practising PACFA members must complete 20 hours of continuing professional development and 10 hours supervision each year, have full indemnity and liability insurance and abide by PACFA's Scope of Practice and Code of Ethics.

Desperate need for access to Registered Clinical Counsellors/Psychotherapists

Australians are in desperate need of access to a highly-skilled and experienced counselling and psychotherapy workforce. Resolve Strategic found that 82% of young people and 50% of people aged 25 and over had experienced mental health issues over the past two years. While the COVID pandemic has undoubtedly exacerbated demand, young people's need for mental health services was exceeding supply pre-2020. In 2018 90% of headspace centres reported that wait times were a major concern and 89 centres surveyed said workforce limitations affected their ability to meet demand.

Meanwhile Australians' difficulty in getting mental health help via a psychologist through GP referral has been well-documented, with the Australian Psychological Society stating on its website that 1 in 3 psychologists are unable to see new clients and 73.5% of psychologists in metropolitan areas have a waiting list.

By contrast, over 60% of PACFA members responding to a survey said they could take on a new client within a fortnight; 23% said they could take on a new client within 48 hours.

Registered Clinical Counsellors/Psychotherapists and Certified Practising Counsellors: ready to meet demand

A survey of PACFA members was conducted during October/November 2020 with results published in the *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia*.

Through the study, a picture of a highly qualified and experienced – and tragically under-utilised – workforce emerges, with 67% holding post-graduate qualifications and 34% being registered as a counsellor or psychotherapist for more than a decade.

In addition, the study revealed that the PACFA member workforce is already managing the most common mental health issues afflicting Australians; anxiety (67%) and depression (55%) were the most common presenting issues to surveyed counsellors and psychotherapists. Issues with relationships (52%) was also high amongst presenting issues for our members' clients. [Given the risk factors of social isolation and loneliness](#) for poor mental health, being able to access a highly qualified and experienced workforce for help with managing these issues is crucial in preventing mental illness.

The therapists surveyed were trained in a variety of modalities including cognitive-behavioural therapy, couples and family therapy, solution-focused therapy, crisis counselling, and trauma-informed counselling.

Availability and scope of practice

In contrast to psychologists and their waiting lists, the study found that nearly a third of certified practising counsellors and registered counsellors/psychotherapists **wanted to work more hours**. It also found that **over a third** were based in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia, compared to 17% of psychologists and 15% of psychiatrists.

The [scope of practice](#) for counsellors spans a mental health spectrum that encompasses **support for clients to maintain mental health** and therapeutic interventions supporting **clients' recovery from mild to moderate mental health concerns**. In addition, counsellors and psychotherapists with advanced training work therapeutically with clients presenting with complex issues/histories such as trauma and eating disorders.

Counsellors and psychotherapists are regarded as key clinicians in the field of treatment for eating disorders, with credentialing offered to our profession by the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Eating Disorders and the National Eating Disorders Collaboration. Counsellors at Eating Disorders Victoria have achieved successful outcomes with short-term counselling interventions as demand for therapy spiked during Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020/2021.

[Recent Australian research](#) comparing psychologists, registered clinical counsellors and social workers, found that counsellors attract significantly fewer complaints and higher levels of patient satisfaction than psychologists.

PACFA's Federal Election 2022 policy platform

The Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia proposes the following policy platform for parties and independent candidates for the 2022 Federal Election. Our policy asks reflect Allied Health Professions Australia's call for 'Fair access to Allied Health for All'.

Better mental health care = better access to Registered Clinical Counsellors/Psychotherapists, Certified Practising Counsellors, Indigenous Healing Practitioners

1. Integrate Registered Clinical Counsellors/Psychotherapists into Better Access

Open the Medicare Better Access scheme to Registered Clinical Counsellors and Registered Clinical Psychotherapists (Counsellors and psychotherapists with education at Bachelor degree level and above – or AQF Level 7 and above – and a minimum of 750 hours client contact since graduating at least 2 years ago.) Please note 'Registered Clinical Counsellor' and 'Registered Clinical Psychotherapist' are PACFA trademarked titles, denoting that these practitioners have met these training standards.

2. Base minimum national standards for counselling and psychotherapy on PACFA's Training Standards

PACFA advocated for and supported the Select Committee into Mental Health and Suicide Prevention recommendation for the establishment of national minimum standards.

National minimum standards would make it simpler for governments, mental health organisations and the public to know what standards of training and experience are required for a counsellor or psychotherapist to use the titles Registered Clinical Counsellor/Psychotherapist and Certified Practising Counsellors, and engage this workforce with confidence.

PACFA's Training Standards are the highest of our profession in Australia. Membership requires training at Bachelor degree level or above (Australian Qualifications Framework Level 7 or above),

with a minimum of 140 hours training provided face-to-face and in person. As stated above, Registered Clinical Counsellor/Psychotherapist members must meet even more rigorous membership criteria: they must have at least two years' experience since completing training and a minimum of 750 client contact hours/75 supervision hours.

Unfortunately, in our self-regulated counselling and psychotherapy profession, PACFA's standards are not currently uniform across Australia; it is possible for a person to work as a counsellor or psychotherapist without any training or minimal training, such as a short course diploma certificate acquired online. This does not support community confidence in the profession.

3. Promote utilisation of Registered Clinical Counsellors, Registered Clinical Psychotherapists and Certified Practising Counsellors as part of Primary Health Network teams.

Revise funding guidelines for PHNs to support employment of Registered Clinical Counsellors/ Psychotherapists and Certified Practising Counsellors in multi-disciplinary teams providing a continuum of care, working to their scope of practice in preventative mental health programs and with clients with mild to moderate mental health issues. Registered Clinical Counsellors and Registered Clinical Psychotherapists with advanced training should also be able to be engaged by Primary Health Network organisations according to their specific scope of practice.

4. Provide funding for a project utilising Indigenous Healing Practitioners in a region of high need

In 2019, PACFA launched our newest organisation of practitioners – the Indigenous-led College of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Practices (CATSIHP). The aim of the CATSIHP is to support, develop and accredit Indigenous Healing Practices, by supporting development and delivery of accredited Indigenous Healing programs and culturally grounded healing practices.

There is a strong need to support the development of a workforce capable of providing therapy services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that are trauma-informed and culturally aware.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples report high levels of psychological distress and mental health issues, mainstream mental health services are often criticised for not addressing their specific cultural needs, with research finding that mainstream health professionals have a limited understanding of cultural safety ([McGough, Wynaden, Wright, 2018](#)).

Trauma informed, culturally strengthening practice is integral to Indigenous Healing Practice as defined within the [Indigenous Healing Practice Training Standards](#) launched in October 2021.

PACFA proposes funding a project which demonstrates Indigenous Healing Practice principles and further develops a culturally strengthening model of care, while addressing the mental health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a region of high demand.

5. Fund a regional pilot project to evaluate a model utilising Registered Clinical Counsellors, Registered Clinical Psychotherapists and Certified Practising Counsellors in fulfilling mental health demand in regional and rural areas of Australia

This data would provide valuable evidence for a future model of care to address the specific inadequacies of service provision in regional, remote and rural areas, to provide evidence for a national regional roll-out.

6. Provide funding for a pilot project to investigate the efficacy of employing Registered Clinical Counsellors/Psychotherapists and Certified Practising Counsellors in schools

The pilot project would consider the efficacy of utilising Registered Clinical Counsellors/ Psychotherapists and produce a cost-benefit analysis of their engagement in school counselling services.

The pilot project would add to existing evidence regarding counsellors' effectiveness in schools. [A randomised controlled trial found](#) that school counsellors were as effective as psychologists in providing CBT to students with social anxiety disorder (Warner, Colognori, Brice, Herzig et al, 2016).

[Cooper, Fugard, McArthur, and Pearce, \(2015\)](#) found that school counselling produced a large positive effect relative to no counselling. This study formed part of an investigation conducted by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy, the British equivalent organisation to PACFA.

PACFA Federal Election 2022 Statement Summary

For too long, Australians have suffered the mental health impacts of COVID-19, while a counselling and psychotherapy workforce that is highly trained, highly experienced – and importantly, has availability to provide support – remains under-utilised.

In PACFA's election statement, we have identified the enormous effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on Australians' mental health – particularly for young people; the dearth of available psychologists; and the minimal number of psychologists and psychiatrists in regional and rural Australia.

We have also identified policy platforms that open doors to Registered Clinical Counsellors, Registered Clinical Psychotherapists and Certified Practising Counsellors – PACFA members who have met the highest training standards in the country, and to Indigenous Healing Practitioners who can provide trauma-informed culturally strengthening therapy with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

These policy measures would help fulfill the unmet demand for mental health services, while developing models of care, evidence and data for the further integration of Registered Clinical Counsellors, Registered Clinical Psychotherapists, Certified Practising Counsellors and Indigenous Healing Practitioners, into the mental health system and workforce.

For more information contact PACFA CEO Johanna de Wever: ceo@pacfa.org.au or visit the [PACFA website](#).

REGISTERED CLINICAL COUNSELLORS AND REGISTERED CLINICAL PSYCHOTHERAPISTS AND CERTIFIED PRACTISING COUNSELLORS

PACFA has trademarked titles which eligible members can use as digital badges to denote they have met our high Training Standards. This supports employers and clients to confidently engage our member counsellors and psychotherapists.

Registered Clinical Counsellors

Registered Clinical Counsellors have completed a Bachelor degree or above (Australian Qualifications Framework Level 7 or above) in a course of at least two years duration, with at least 400 hours of counselling or psychotherapy subjects (and at least 140 hours face-to-face and in person).

Registered Clinical Psychotherapists

Registered Clinical Psychotherapists have met the same standards as Registered Clinical Counsellors but are also members of PACFA's College of Psychotherapy, which upgraded its Training Standards for membership in December 2020.

Certified Practising Counsellors

Certified Practising Counsellors are early career counsellors who have met our Training Standards, including 40 hours client contact and 10 supervision hours.