



REPARATIVE OR CONVERSION THERAPY BACKGROUND DOCUMENT

Prepared By: ACSW Sexual and Gender Diversity Member Interest Group

Recently, cities across Canada and in Alberta have made a move to ban or restrict the practice of reparative or conversion therapy. In the Winter issue of *The Advocate*, Jody-Lee Farrah (2019) quotes Minister of Justice, Doug Schweitzer in saying that “the province opposes and condemns conversion therapy, which is a prohibited practice for all regulated health professionals in the province” (p. 12). Minister Schweitzer goes on to note that this includes a complete legal ban on these practices without reference to a source. As with all harmful practices, we can assert that this is a prohibited activity for social workers based on our Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics, what we want to ensure is that registered social workers in Alberta know and understand this.

Reparative or conversion therapy is one form of a controversial set of “treatments” proposing that sexual orientation and gender identity can (and, in many cases, should) be changed to reflect heteronormative standards. These practices often target LGBTQ2S+ children and adolescents, who are often forced into treatment by their parents or guardians and have lasting impacts into adulthood. Academic and regulatory consensus within the medical, psychological, social work and counselling communities is that conversion and reparative therapies lack empirical support or evidence and that attempts to change sexual orientation or gender identity are ineffective, unethical and harmful.

The ACSW Sexual and Gender Diversity Member Interest Group is proposing a practice statement that would achieve three aims:

- To affirm Sexual and Gender Diverse clients and populations;
- To oppose the use of reparative and/or conversion therapies by social work professionals in Alberta;
- To restrict referrals to those individuals who fully inform adult clients of its lack of scientific evidence, the potential risks, and its limited outcomes.

This proposed practice statement further delineates our profession’s Core Social Work Values and Principles and reflects our collective commitments to diversity, social justice, and evidence-based practice. In addition, this proposed practice statement is in alignment with similar statements made by the CASW, NASW, the Canadian Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy and many other professional bodies in North America and around the world.

This issue was raised with the Alberta College of Social Workers Council in April 2017 and at that time there was a motion to draft a statement and bring it back to council for review and approval. In addition, at the time, there was a commitment from the Health Professions Act to include a ban for all health professions on this practice. To date, that has not occurred and therefore, the Alberta College of Social Workers needs to make a practice statement for its members to make clear their position.