



PRACTICE STATEMENT ON REPARATIVE OR CONVERSION THERAPY*

ISSUE:

The mandate of the Alberta College of Social Workers is protection of the public. The intention of this information sheet is to provide guidance on the role of registered social workers with the practice of *conversion therapy*, also known as *reparative therapy*, and to ensure protection of the public from unprofessional and unethical social work practice. Engaging in practices that could be described as *reparative or conversion therapy*, in any form does not align with the core values of the social work profession; the CASW Code of Ethics and the ACSW Standards of Practice.

BACKGROUND:

Conversion therapy, also known as *reparative therapy*, “involves an array of pseudo-scientific interventions that aim to alter same-sex attractions with the goal of promoting heterosexuality” (George, 2017; Bright, 2004 as cited in New Brunswick Association of Social Workers, 2019). More recently, these practices have alleged to also address issues of gender identity and gender expression. Some interventions include the use of medication, religious rites, behavioural, cognitive, and cognitive-behavioural strategies, as well as individual and group counselling (New Brunswick Association of Social Workers, 2019). The term sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) includes any form of *conversion therapy* and refers to any practice seeking to change, eliminate, or reduce behaviors relating to sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. *Conversion therapy* has historical roots in being identified as a mental disorder. As a result, LGBTQ2S+ people experienced relentless oppression that has led to stigma, discrimination, human rights violations, criminalization, violence and death.

In Alberta, municipal governments are taking action to ban these harmful practices by prohibiting business licenses for those that provide *conversion therapy* where the Provincial government has not acted. Several Canadian Provinces have passed provincial legislation banning the practice of *conversion therapy*. In 2019, the federal government had rejected a petition calling for a national ban on *conversion therapy* as the federal government stated that it believed that it is a provincial or territorial concern. The Alberta government has positioned itself against the use of *conversion therapy* but currently there is no legislative changes to expressly prevent the practice.

CASW CODE OF ETHICS & ACSW STANDARDS OF PRACTICE:

The CASW Code of Ethics and the ACSW Standards of Practice provide foundational practice guidance for all social workers. These governance documents are used to inform social work practice and provide minimum standards which all social workers practicing in Alberta are



expected to meet. With respect to practices that might be described as *conversion or reparative therapy*, the following Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice provide ethical obligation and practice guidance.

CASW CODE OF ETHICS (2005)

Value 1: Respect for Inherent Dignity and Worth of Persons

Principles:

- Social workers respect the unique worth and inherent dignity of all people and uphold human rights.
- Social workers respect the diversity among individuals in Canadian society and the right of individuals to their unique beliefs consistent with the rights of others.
- Social workers uphold the right of every person to be free from violence and threat of violence.

Value 2: Pursuit of Social Justice

Principles:

- social workers advocate for equitable treatment and protection under the law and challenge injustices, especially injustices that affect the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Value 3: Service to Humanity

Principles:

- social workers strive to use the power and authority vest in them as professionals in responsible ways that serve the needs of clients and the promotion of social justice.
- Social workers place the needs of clients above self-interest when acting in a professional capacity.

Value 4: Integrity in Professional Practice

Principles:

- social workers demonstrate and promote qualities of honesty, reliability, impartiality and diligence in their professional practice.
- social workers demonstrate adherence to the values and ethical principles of the profession and promote respect for the profession's values and principles in organizations where they work or with which they have a professional affiliation.

Value 6: Competence in Professional Practice

Principles:

- social workers uphold the right of clients to be offered the highest quality service possible
- social workers strive to maintain and increase their professional knowledge and skill



ACSW STANDARDS OF PRACTICE (MARCH 2019)

B.2 Professional Performance

(b) A social worker will advocate with and on behalf of clients and for the betterment of society.

i. A social worker is responsible for articulating the needs of and supporting clients in communicating with relevant others.

ii. A social worker will take reasonable actions to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, with special regard to disadvantaged or oppressed groups and persons.

iii. A social workers will make reasonable efforts to promote conditions that encourage respect for the diversity of cultures that constitute society.

iv. A social workers will make reasonable efforts to advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions and to promote social justice.

B. 11 Referral

(d) A social worker will not refer clients to any practitioner who is known to be practicing in a manner not consistent with social work values and ethics.

E.2 Cultural Competence

(a) A social worker will acknowledge and respect the impact that their own heritage, values, beliefs, and preferences can have on their practice and on clients whose background and values may be different from their own.

(b) A social worker will be able to work with a wide range of people who are culturally different from the social worker or who may be considered to be members of vulnerable populations on the basis of attributes such as those listed in section F.1 (a).

(c) A social worker will obtain a working knowledge and understanding of their clients' racial and cultural affiliations, identities, values, beliefs, and customs and will be to apply this knowledge in the provision of services.

F.1 Dignity of Clients

(a) A social worker will not impose any stereotypes on a client based on behaviour, values or roles related to race, ethnicity, religion, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status, income source or amount, political affiliation, disability or diagnosis, language, or national origin that would interfere with the provision of professional services to the client.

(b) A social worker will use reasonable advocacy and other intervention activities to ensure that the dignity, individuality, and rights of their clients are safeguarded.

LEGISLATION

No client shall be discriminated against under the protected grounds in the *Alberta Human Rights Act* [2000, c. A25.5] that include but not limited to gender, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation.



SOCIAL WORK ACROSS CANADA:

ACSW accompanies the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) and many other professional organizations in opposing all forms of *conversion therapy*. Interventions reported to suppress or change sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression are harmful practices, not therapy. *Conversion therapy* infringes on the guiding principles inherent to social work values and ethics and the practice of *conversion therapy* violates the tenets of the social work profession.

Engaging in the practice of *conversion therapy*, in any form, does not align with the core values of the social work profession, the CASW Code of Ethics and the ACSW Standards of Practice. ACSW recognizes that sexual and gender diverse identities and expressions are normal and healthy variations within the whole of human experiences. Social workers will work with all members of the sexual and gender diverse community in a manner consistent with core social work values, ethics and principles.

REFERENCES:

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*The terms *conversion and reparative therapy* are italicized throughout this document to distinguish these harmful practices from actual therapy.