



# Professional competencies and Code of conduct for psychologists

Rachel Phillips, PsyBA Chair

June 2025



## Acknowledgement of country

*In the spirit of respect, the Psychology Board of Australia acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and seas of Australia and their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities.*

*We pay our respects to the Elders past and present for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.*



# Agenda

- A brief context for competency reform
  - Why the competencies have been updated
  - What has changed
  - Transition – purpose and timeframes

## [Psychology Board of Australia - Professional competencies for psychology](#)

- A brief context for the new Code of Conduct reform
  - Why has the Board authored its own Code
  - What has changed
  - Transition – purpose and timeframes

## [Psychology Board of Australia - Code of conduct](#)



# Education training and reform (ETR): The program of work



Phase	Program of work	Timeframe
1	Retiring the 4+2 internship program as a pathway to general registration	2015-2029  Last cohort: June 2022  Retirement: January 2029
2	A comprehensive review of the professional competencies for psychologists in Australia	2019-2025  The competencies come into effect 1 December 2025
3	Reforming the assessment of internationally trained psychologists	2025 - 2026
4	Redesigning the higher degree pathway	2025 - 2026
5	A comprehensive review of area of practice endorsement	TBA



# Professional competencies for psychologists

Advance copy published on: August 2024  
Effective from: 1 December 2025



# What are competencies?

- A set of benchmarks that describe to the public the minimum knowledge, skills and attributes required to practice safely and effectively
- Competencies are used in:
  - An educational context when completing a qualification, and
  - A regulatory context
    - When setting the minimum threshold for registration at entry into the profession
    - When maintaining competence over the course of a Psychologist's career
    - When assessing international applicants for registration
- Help establish the professional identity of the psychology profession
- Distinguish a psychologist from other professions



# Why the competencies needed updating

- The competencies have not been updated since the beginning of the [National Scheme](#) in 2010
- To ensure that psychologists continue to meet the needs and expectations of the community
- To increase the emphasis on cultural safety to align with recent changes to the National Law
- To align with international psychology benchmarks and community expectations
- Make it easier for the public to understand what they can expect from a psychologist



# Our process of review



- Research and development based on evidence and expertise
- Receiving advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychologists
- Engagement with professional associations, independent experts, HODSPA, and APAC regarding development and implementation
- Preliminary and public consultation
- Assessment from the Office of Impact Analysis is for minor impact





# Updates to the core competencies

- Reorganising and updating the eight core competencies
- Listing all the competencies in one document
- Increased emphasis on:
  - culturally safe care with Indigenous peoples
  - working with the range of individual diversity
  - awareness of influence of psychologist's own cultural identity
  - professional reflexivity, deliberate practice and self-care
  - digital competency in digital health practice



# Reorganising the general registration competencies

## Current/old

1. Knowledge of the discipline
2. Ethical, legal, and professional matters
3. Psychological assessment and measurement
4. Intervention strategies
5. Research and evaluation
6. Communication and interpersonal relationships
7. Working with people from diverse groups
8. Practice across the lifespan\*

\*Lifespan is moved to all competencies, specifically mentioned in C4, C5, and C8.

## Updated

1. Applies and builds scientific knowledge of psychology to inform safe and effective practice
2. Practices ethically and professionally
3. Exercises professional reflexivity, purposeful and deliberate practice, and self-care
4. Conducts psychological assessments
5. Conducts psychological interventions
6. Communicates and relates to others effectively and appropriately
7. Demonstrates a health equity and human rights approach when working people from diverse groups
8. Demonstrates a health equity and human rights approach when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities



## C3: Professional reflexivity, deliberate practice and self-care

- Expands and updates the current C2: Ethical, legal and professional matters
- Outlines competencies already required elsewhere
- Outlines competencies already accepted in the profession
- International regulators are being more explicit about these competencies
- Evidence base is more explicit about how these competencies are related to safe practice



## C7: Demonstrates a health equity and human rights approach when working people from diverse groups

- Embedding **cultural responsiveness** into the competencies
- Including an expanded list (not exhaustive) of individual/cultural diversity areas
- Emphasising the importance of **client-centred care** and actively working towards providing positive mental health outcomes for people with diverse individual and cultural backgrounds, and vulnerable members of the community
- Adding a **health equity** and **human rights** approach



## C8: Demonstrates a health equity and human rights approach when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities

- The importance of embedding **culturally safe care** into the competencies
- **All psychologists** need to actively work towards providing positive health outcomes for Australia's First Nations Peoples
- Changes to the National Law
  - Our commitment to the [National Scheme's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Cultural Safety Strategy](#) and [Statement of Intent](#)
  - Commitment to **close the gap** by 2031



# Professional Competencies Transition



- Advanced copy of the [Professional competencies for psychologists](#) published on 7 August 2024
  - Date of effect: 1 December 2025
- The Guidelines for the national psychology exam have been updated to include the professional competencies (aiming to publish in July)
  - The national psychology exam will be based on the updated competencies after the competencies come into effect (February 2026 exam block)
- Currently analysing feedback received from consultation about the Guidelines for the 5+1 internship program.
- The Guidelines for 5+1 internship program are being updated to include the professional competencies (aiming to publish in September 2025).



# Working with partners on transition

- APAC
  - Updating APAC Standards – [consultation](#) underway
- HODSPA/HEPs
  - Importance of training for future workforce
  - Updating units of study; quality assurance processes
- Professional Associations
  - Importance of CPD for current workforce
  - Supporting membership learning and change
  - Relevant CPD offerings
- AIPEP/AIPA
  - Future and current workforce
  - Development of training and CPD guidance



# Resources

- [Fact sheets](#) for the updated competencies
  - What is changed; Board's expectation; CPD ideas
  - C3, C7, C8
  - Digital competency
- [Self-assessment tool](#) - template and instructions
- [FAQ](#) for specific stakeholders on what to do
  - Provisional and general psychologists
  - Supervisors
  - Employers
  - Education providers







# **Code of conduct** for psychologists

Advance copy published on: November 2024  
Effective from: 1 December 2025



# Context

- All Boards may develop codes or guidelines to provide guidance to the profession they register
  - The Board must undertake periodic review of standards and guidelines including wide ranging consultation
- PsyBA has endorsed the APS Code of Ethics since 2010
  - PsyBA is the only Board that does not have a Board authored Code of Conduct
- The National Boards all have Code of Conduct that is aligned to the Shared Code of Conduct



# How is a Code of Conduct used?



Guidance to psychologists about the minimum standards of conduct expected



Assess concerns about conduct below the standard expected and if any regulatory action is necessary



Support the public to understand appropriate conduct from psychologists



# Adapting the Shared Code of conduct

- A regulatory code of conduct sets the minimum expected standards of practice and conduct to manage risk
- Alignment where appropriate to other professions' codes of conduct to provide consistency of expectations across the scheme



# The Shared Code framework



Used by 12 other health professions in the National Scheme  
Mirrored from the MBA Good Medical Practice framework



Recently reviewed in 2022



Development was informed by extensive research, international benchmarking, wide-ranging consultation and user-testing



One standalone document setting out standards



Proven to be robust and fit for regulatory purpose



# Developing the PsyBA Code of Conduct



Mapping Shared Code to APS Code of Ethics



A review of notifications data, tribunal outcomes & coronial recommendations



Advice from experts to develop code that reflects the diversity of psychological practice



User-testing with regulatory decision makers



Comprehensive public consultation



# Key updates

- Changes to language and structure
  - Expectations of professional conduct and behaviours more explicit
- Emphasis on cultural safety
  - Adopting the agreed NRAS definition
  - Aligns to professional competency domain 8
- Updates following public consultation to make the clauses clearer and more comprehensive to the diverse context of psychological practice



# Key Updates

- Strengthening and clarifying standards on professional boundaries
- Removal of arbitrary timeline the ‘two-year rule’ and strengthened focus on the
  - inherent power differential
  - extent of professional relationship
  - vulnerability of client and risk of exploitation
  - reflect on continuing duty to client
  - all types of professional boundary violations





# What is not changing

- The minimum threshold for expected conduct and behaviour of Psychologists in Australia
  - The Board is not expecting more notifications
- Application of continuing professional development (CPD) standard to upskill where required and utilise peer reflection for safe practice



# Transition

- Advance copy of the code was published November 2024, 12 months
  - date of effect **1 December 2025**
  - the date of effect of the *Professional competencies for psychologists* and updated [Provisional and general registration standards](#)
- Everyone has time to plan and complete any change management activities and professional development



**Thank you**

