

Fact sheet:

Professional competencies for psychologists

Understanding Competency 7: Demonstrates a health equity and human rights approach when working with people from diverse groups

Background

The *Professional competencies for psychologists* emphasise the importance for all psychologists to:

- provide client-centred care
- actively work towards providing positive health and mental health outcomes for people with diverse individual and cultural backgrounds, and vulnerable members of the community, and
- engage in ongoing and reflective and reflexive learning about working with people coming from diverse groups.

Psychology Board of Australia (the Board) has improved Competency 7 to better address the various kinds of diversity in the Australian community by:

- including an expanded list (not exhaustive) of individual and cultural diversity areas (17 rather than the current five areas)
- specifically including migrants and refugees, their families and communities as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- specifically including disability and neurodiversity, and
- highlighting the importance for psychologists to be trained to provide services to clients across the lifespan.

The *Professional competencies for psychologists* are in effect from 1 December 2025.

What are the key features of safe, effective and competent practice?

Competency 7.1

Works without discrimination and is inclusive, sensitive and respectful of all forms of individual diversity in clients, colleagues, and relevant others and with an understanding of intersecting forms of diversity. This includes, but is not limited to age, race, ethnicity, language, culture, immigration status, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, physical attributes, abilities, disability, cognitive capacity, social and/or economic status, geographic location, educational attainment, and religious and/or spiritual orientation.

Competency 7.2

Works with knowledge and understanding of the history of psychological theories and practice, their impact on people from diverse groups, and referral pathways to specialised supports where appropriate.

Competency 7.3

Understands the impact of cultural identity, values, beliefs and experiences on psychological wellbeing or behaviour – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, migrant and refugee experiences.

Competency 7.4

Recognises the impact of one's own values, beliefs, experiences, positionality and cultural identity on practice and demonstrates an ongoing commitment to culturally responsive practice.

Competency 7.5

Demonstrates the ability to reflect on and learn from clients/relevant others and their unique experiences.

Competency 7.6

Adapts psychological practice in response to the needs of people from diverse social identity groups and different cultural backgrounds to effectively engage with clients, carers, families, those with lived experience and relevant others.

Competency 7.7

Applies the principles of trauma-aware and culturally informed care.

Competency 7.8

Understands the roles of, and works collaboratively with, service providers and professionals who support socially and culturally diverse individuals and groups.

Competency 7.9

Understands neurodiversity, strengths-based, trauma-informed and positive approaches to supporting people with developmental disability. Demonstrates the ability to adapt psychological practice and make reasonable adjustments for people with disability, including understanding of alternative and augmentative communication.

Other competencies that are relevant to working with people from diverse groups

Competency 4.1

Has knowledge of the relative strengths and limitations of the different methods of assessment and modes of delivery relevant to practice *across the lifespan* and in different contexts, including *cultural contexts*.

Competency 5.1

Has knowledge of the efficacy and effectiveness of a range of interventions and modes of delivery relevant to practice *across the lifespan* and in different contexts, including *cultural contexts*.

Competency 6.1

Communicates effectively and professionally with a diverse range of clients, colleagues and stakeholders.

What does this mean for practitioners?

Psychologists practising in Australia have always been required to be adequately trained to work with sensitivity and respect with the diversity of clients, colleagues and other people that a psychologist is likely to encounter in their day-to-day work.

These competencies provide additional clarity and guidance about the Board's requirements.

Psychologists should understand the complex circumstances that influence the health and mental health of people coming from diverse groups, and how these factors impact people's experience of healthcare and health systems.

It is the practitioner's responsibility to understand the history and preconceptions of psychology and the impact of this on the effectiveness of psychological practice on diverse groups, to recognise their own personal background and how to interact with people who are different from the practitioner, and to exercise reflexivity and critical evaluation of their own practice.

We expect psychologists to be proactive in thinking about the services they deliver, and intentionally work towards providing equitable, accessible, sustainable, timely and culturally responsive care within their scope of practice.

There is no set way to meet this competency. Practitioners should use their professional judgement when applying the *Professional competencies for psychologists* to ensure they can sufficiently demonstrate them in their role and workplace as relevant to their scope of practice.

What does culture mean?

Culture is a collectively learned repertoire of intangible and tangible elements. Culture includes world views, beliefs, symbols, ideas, values, codes of behaviour (intangible) and artefacts, tools, language, literature (tangible). Culture helps members of that society, community or group to communicate, understand, and interpret expressions of that society, community or group. Culture extends beyond race and ethnicity to include (for example), faith/religion, sexual orientation, region of residence, socioeconomic status and literacy level.

What does diversity mean?

Diversity is an attribute similar to heterogeneity, signifying the presence and inclusion of individuals, groups, and cultures that are different from each other, but also including respect for and appreciation of those variables which define the differences.

What does cultural responsiveness mean?

Cultural responsiveness is paying particular attention to social and cultural factors in managing the care of clients from all cultural backgrounds. It includes the ability to learn from and relate respectfully to people of your own culture as well as those from other cultures. It is the means by which we achieve, maintain and govern cultural safety.

Cultural responsiveness describes strengths-based, action-oriented and culturally capable approaches that facilitate increased access to affordable, available, appropriate and acceptable healthcare. It is an ongoing process that requires humility and regular and deliberate reflexive practice to develop practitioner knowledge, skills and actions. It includes genuine dialogue to improve practice and client health outcomes. It is the responsibility of the health professional to deliver culturally responsive healthcare.

We use the term 'cultural responsiveness' rather than 'cultural competence' to highlight the importance of practitioners engaging in ongoing learning.

What does a health equity and human rights approach mean?

Health equity means ensuring that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. Achieving this requires ongoing societal efforts to address historical and contemporary injustices; and to work towards overcoming the economic, social, and other obstacles to health and healthcare (the social determinants of health). This requires psychologists to provide high quality healthcare and to adopt practices that respect diversity, and avoid bias, discrimination and racism

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme's [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health strategy statement of intent](#) (the Statement of Intent) highlights our commitment to achieve equity in health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other Australians and to [close the gap](#) by 2031.

A **Human rights approach** provides a foundational frame of reference to help psychologists understand and tackle inequities and to do our part to improve the health and wellbeing of the Australian community. In a human rights approach to health, for example, all clients have the right to receive safe and high-quality healthcare, to be shown respect, dignity and consideration, to be informed about their treatment, to be included in decisions about their care, and to have the right to privacy and confidentiality.

A human rights approach is applicable across all sectors where psychologists work, for example, for providing direct client care, for developing practical approaches for public health, for addressing health inequity, for promoting mental health, for developing health system actions, for writing health policy and conducting research.

Case study

Anna is a manager of a team of 20 psychologists providing outpatient care to children, adults, and families in a regional area. She understands that some clients who need the services of her clinic will not find it easy to access them.

After reading the *Professional competencies for psychologists*, Anna reflected on how the clinic could be more inclusive towards the diversity of people living in her community, and wondered what she and her team could do to help tackle local service inequities.

Anna compared the demographics of her community with those attending the clinic, and discovered that there was a disproportionately low number of clients from migrant and refugee communities using the service, and a high number of people with autism in the community seeking improved access to suitable assessment and treatment.

Anna brought this to the attention of her team, and together they decided to develop a plan for a clinic-wide strategy to improve their services to these groups.

Anna and her staff conducted a survey of current and past clients to better understand their service needs, and to understand how the clinic could make positive changes. She also invited migrant and refugee advocacy groups and the local autism support network to provide the clinic with advice, and to help them gain insight and discover potential barriers for these groups.

After reflecting on this feedback, Anna and her team decided to enhance their clinic's offerings. In consultation with representatives from the local groups, they put together a comprehensive plan to help improve their services and reduce service inequalities in the community.

As the clinic manager, Anna was tasked with updating the clinic's mission statement, policies and advertising about service offerings to ensure it was in line with their new focus. This included updates to the website to include culturally appropriate messaging and to clearly represent a more diverse range of clients. It also included modifications to the clinic environment by displaying culturally inclusive art work, modifying the seating in the waiting area, as well as designing a therapy room that minimised sensory input (lower lighting, appropriate seats, and avoidance of certain textures).

Two new psychologists were employed to help the clinic transition to its more inclusive focus. One had expertise in working with migrant and refugee groups and the other in neurodiverse-affirming approaches to diagnosis and therapy.

In addition, the whole team agreed to do CPD on how to adapt communication style, how to use alternative modes of communication during therapy

sessions, and how to select and modify assessments to ensure they are culturally responsive and accommodate the unique needs of a more diverse range of clients.

CPD guidance

Psychologists have an ongoing commitment to learning, education and training as outlined in the Board's [Continuing professional development \(CPD\) registration standard](#).

Practitioners who identify learning needs for Competency 7 should consider the level or depth of professional development required based on their scope of practice and work context.

We expect that all psychologists will have a foundational level of understanding so they can meet the minimum threshold professional competency.

We know that some psychologists will deepen their training in some areas of diversity more than other areas due to their scope of practice, or personal or professional interest in working with specific clients.

Practitioners who identify learning needs for Competency 7 may wish to consider focusing learning activities in the following areas (as relevant to your scope of practice):

- understanding the impact of cultural identity, values, beliefs, and experiences (including migrant and refugee experiences) on psychological wellbeing or behaviour
- improving your knowledge and skills in understanding, working with, teaching, managing, researching or supervising people from diverse groups
- understanding the intersecting forms of diversity and how this impacts those with whom you work, train, supervise or research
- improving how you work collaboratively with culturally responsive service providers and professionals, and
- having regular meaningful conversations with your supervisor regarding Competency 7, particularly about recognising the impact of your own values, beliefs, experiences, positionality and cultural identity on your practice.

CPD includes a variety of learning modes such as: reading, workshops, seminars, conferences, professional podcasts or DVDs, active CPD, master classes, supervision, and includes reflective and reflexive professional practice.

The Professional competencies for psychologists were made after wide-ranging public consultation, to ensure they are contemporary and relevant to safe and effective psychology practice.