

## **Fact sheet:**

# Professional competencies for psychologists

**How to do a self-assessment against the general  
registration competencies**

# Background

## General registration competencies

The competencies for general registration have been updated. The Psychology Board of Australia (the Board) has published the *Professional competencies for psychologists* over 12 months before they come into effect. This is to give practitioners time to self-assess against the updated competencies and carry out continuing professional development (CPD) in any areas where there are gaps that are relevant to your scope of practice.

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

## Continuing professional development

Every year psychologists are required to complete 30 hours of continuing professional development (CPD) for renewal of their registration and to maintain competence.

The [Continuing professional development standard](#) and the [Guidelines for continuing professional development](#) require psychologists to self-assess and develop a written outcome-focused learning plan that identifies learning needs and goals for the year.

The focus of the learning plan is on refreshing, extending or improving knowledge and skills in relation to the *threshold professional competencies* for general registration as relevant to the practitioner's job description, career stage and individual scope of 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.

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

The *Professional competencies for psychologists* outline the importance of regularly self-assessing to maintain competence.

Competency 3.3 Critically evaluates the effectiveness of own professional practice and strengths and weaknesses, including regularly self-assessing against the professional competencies.

The regulatory purpose of CPD is to protect the public and ensure that psychological practice is contemporary, safe and effective and aligned with the general registration competencies.

## What does maintaining competence mean for psychologists?

Psychologists practising in Australia are required to be suitably qualified and competent to practise safely.

Psychologists should only practise in the areas where they have the knowledge, skills and experience to practise safely and effectively, and not practise in the areas where they are not proficient to do so, and where they may pose a danger to the public or themselves.

When **applying for general registration** as a psychologist we require practitioners to demonstrate threshold professional competence for all eight competencies in the *Professional competencies for psychologists*. This is considered to be met by completing a Board-approved qualification, carrying out any required supervised practice (e.g. practicum, internship) and passing the national psychology exam (if required).

When **renewing registration** each year, we expect psychologists to meet threshold professional competency in all eight competencies as relevant to their individual scope of practice throughout their career. Threshold professional competence is maintained by:

- self-assessing against the professional competencies and completing the required CPD each year
- doing regular peer supervision
- engaging in meaningful reflective and reflexive professional practice, and
- working as a psychologist (including meeting the [Recency of practice registration standard](#)).

Every psychologist's CPD learning plan will be different depending on professional experience, the nature of their psychology practice and work role.

There is no set way to self-assess against the *Professional competencies for psychologists*.

Practitioners should use their professional judgement when developing their learning plan.

## Definitions to know before self-assessing

### What does practice mean?

**Practice** means any role, whether remunerated or not, in which the individual uses their skills and knowledge as a registered psychologist in the profession. Practice in this context is not restricted to the provision of direct clinical care. It also includes using professional knowledge in a direct non-clinical relationship with clients, working in management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory or policy development roles, and any other roles that impact on the safe, effective delivery of services in the profession.

### What does threshold professional competency mean?

**Threshold professional competency** is a benchmark that describes the minimum professional knowledge, skills and other attributes necessary to practise as a registered psychologist in Australia.

It is based on the premise that competency can be described on a continuum. The threshold represents the point on the continuum at which the minimum acceptable level of competence is reached to practise safely and effectively as a psychologist.

## What does scope of practice mean for the psychology profession?

**Scope of practice for the psychology profession** is defined by the general registration competencies. These competencies distinguish a psychologist from other professions, for example occupational therapy, medicine, and pharmacy. The competencies describe the knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours, values and other attributes that enable a person to engage in safe and effective practice as a psychologist in Australia.

## What does an individual scope of practice mean?

**An individual scope of practice** refers to the professional role and services that an individual registered practitioner is educated and competent to perform.

It refers to the role (e.g. therapist), context of work (e.g. private practice), or areas of psychology (e.g. trauma) in which a psychologist can demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and experience to practise safely and effectively in a way that meets our standards and does not pose any danger to the public or to themselves.

An individual's scope of practice evolves over time, and can change, narrow or deepen, depending on vocational choices, career paths, and as the profession advances and new roles or techniques emerge in the evolving practice environment.

## Articulating the competencies across different work roles

### Do I have to meet every competency descriptor?

Each of the eight competencies in the *Professional competencies for psychologists* have a broad competency title, and several specific competency descriptors.

While not all descriptors will be relevant to every psychologist's work role, all eight competencies are relevant to every psychologist and every work context.

For example, a psychologist who works at a school will be very familiar with *Competency 4: Conducts psychological assessments* and may regularly use the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-V) relevant to descriptor 4.4.

A psychologist who is a manager may not have given the WISC-V for many years as it is not in their scope of practice. However, competency descriptor 4.9 (Identifies and manages inherent risks associated with assessments) may be very important to their role as

they ensure staff and supervisors who report to them have adequate processes, procedures and resources to conduct appropriate assessments safely and effectively with their clients.

## How can the same competency apply in different work roles?

The *Professional competencies for psychologists* have been written at a high (or macro) level. This means they clearly describe the requirement, but also allow flexibility for psychologists to apply the competencies to the many different contexts where psychologists work.

For example, competency descriptor 5.4 (Outlines the risks and benefits of treatment) is relevant to psychologists providing direct care (e.g. informed consent for a specific intervention), to managers (e.g. developing safe operational procedures for an inpatient eating disorder clinic) and policy advisors (e.g. considering the direct effect that policy can have on treatment when developing updated competencies for psychologists).

## What to do if you fall below the threshold

### Self-assessing below the threshold in an area where you are not working

If you self-assess as below threshold professional competency in an area outside of your scope of practice, you do not pose a risk to the public because you are not working in this area.

For example, if your knowledge and skills in treating children diagnosed with ADHD (Competency 5.5 – Conducting culturally safe interventions) does not meet threshold, this should not pose a risk to the public if you don't work with children.

However, if your scope of practice is in providing treatment and assessments to clients in the aged care sector (rather than with children), and you self-assess as meeting threshold (or even excelling) in C5.5 with your elder adult client group, you are not at risk to the public because you are working within your scope of practice.

### Self-assessing below the threshold in an area where you work

If a psychologist fails to maintain at least the threshold level of professional competency in all areas relevant to their individual scope of practice, they could pose a risk to the public.

If you self-assess as below threshold professional competence in an area that is essential for your job, you need to carefully review your practice to ensure it is safe.

If you work in an organisation, we advise that you talk with your manager and/or supervisor about the appropriate steps to take. If you are in private practice, we advise that you talk with your supervisor and/or colleagues about the appropriate steps to take.

You may need to refer a client to another psychologist with the relevant training and competency. You may need to restrict your job duties until you have done sufficient training and supervision to practise safely and effectively.

### **Extending your scope of practice**

If you are thinking about moving into a new work role or expanding your scope of practice in your current job, then you are required to determine a learning plan for CPD and supervision to ensure you meet the minimum competency threshold to practise safely and effectively in that area.

## **The steps in doing a self-assessment**

Use the self-assessment tool as a guide to carry out your self-assessment against the general registration competencies. There are six steps:

Step 1: Read the CPD standard and guidelines.

Step 2: Read the *Professional competencies for psychologists*.

Step 3: Consider how the competencies apply to your scope of practice.

Step 4: Evaluate your own professional knowledge, skills and attributes against the general registration competencies as relevant to your scope of practice. Notice where there are gaps and opportunities to make improvements.

Step 5: Create an outcome-focused learning plan that identifies your CPD needs and goals for the year as identified through your self-assessment against the general registration competencies.

Step 6: Review and adjust your plan as needed.

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.