

Newfoundland & Labrador  
**College of  
Social Workers**

**Position Statement  
Conversion Therapy**

Adopted October 2021

## **Newfoundland and Labrador College of Social Workers (NLCSW)**

The NLCSW is responsible for regulating the practice of social work under provincial legislation titled the *Social Workers Act* (2010). The vision is excellence in social work.

### **Social Work in NL**

The *Social Workers Act* (2010) defines social work as the assessment, remediation and prevention of psycho-social problems and the enhancement of the social, psycho-social functioning and well being of individuals, families, groups and communities by using social work knowledge, theory and skills to

- i. provide direct counselling and therapy services to a client,
- ii. develop, implement, manage or deliver human service programs, including those done in collaboration with other professions,
- iii. contribute to the development and advancement of health and social policy, and
- iv. conduct research in the science, technique and practice of social work.

### **Conversion Therapy**

Conversion therapy, or reparative therapy, includes “treatment, practice, or sustained effort in denying, repressing, discouraging, or changing a person's sexual orientation. These practices attempt to alter a non-heterosexual sexual orientation, non-cisgender gender identity or gender expression, or any behaviours associated with a gender other than the person's sex assigned at birth” (CASW, 2021). It promotes heterosexuality through behavior modification, counselling, psychosocial education, and other approaches.

As a profession, social workers uphold human rights, embrace self-determination, demonstrate respect for all persons, and promote dignity, equity, and inclusion. “Social workers do not tolerate discrimination based on age, abilities, ethnic background, gender, language, marital status, national ancestry, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic status” (CASW Code of Ethics, p.3). Conversion or reparative therapies are not in keeping with the ethics, values, and standards of the social work profession as they foster oppression and discrimination against 2SLGBTQ+ individuals.

Conversion or reparative therapies have also been shown to be psychologically and physically harmful to individuals who receive this treatment. Wells (2019) highlights harmful impacts such as “increased anxiety, depression, self-hatred, compromised mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide or suicidal thoughts, and many other lifelong psychological and social issues” (p. 4).

Social work practice is grounded in evidence-based social work knowledge and theory. According to the Pan American Health Organization (2012), there is no medical or scientific evidence for sexual reorientation efforts. Therefore, the use of conversion or reparative interventions are not supported by evidence-based decision-making.

## **Social Work Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice**

Social workers in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) must be aware of and adhere to the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) (2005) Code of Ethics, CASW (2005) Guidelines for Ethical Practice and the NLCSW (2020) Standards of Practice for Social Workers in Newfoundland and Labrador. As it pertains to conversion or reparative therapy approach, the following values and standards are important.

### CASW (2005) Code of Ethics

#### Value 1: Respect for the Inherent Dignity and Worth of Persons

- Social workers respect the unique worth and dignity of all people and uphold human rights.
- Social workers uphold each person's right to self-determination, consistent with that person's capacity and with the rights of others.
- 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 respect the client's right to make choices based on voluntary, informed consent.
- Social workers uphold the right of every person to be free from violence and the threat of violence.

#### Value 2: Pursuit of Social Justice

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

#### Value 3: Service to Humanity

- Social workers strive to use the power and authority vested in them as professionals in responsible ways that serve the needs of clients and the promotion of social justice.
- Social workers promote individual development and pursuit of individual goals, as well as the development of a just society.

#### Value 4: Integrity in 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.

## NLCSW (2020) Standards of Practice

- Social workers strive for impartiality in their professional practice, and refrain from imposing their personal values, opinions and preferences on clients.
- Social workers discuss client's needs, options and preferences before continuing or discontinuing services, or offering to seek transfer or referral.
- Social workers seek to understand the values, beliefs, traditions and historical context of clients and incorporate this knowledge into social work assessments and interventions.
- Social workers demonstrate the use of effective intervention skills when working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Social workers do not discriminate against any person due to culture, religion, social economic status, gender, age, sexual orientation or disability.
- Social workers carry out their work with honesty, reliability and diligence.
- Social workers must be familiar with the laws and regulations relevant to their practice.
- Social workers comply with provincial and federal legislation that is applicable to their practice.

## Human Rights Legislation NL

As outlined in the Human Rights Act (2010), "it is recognized in the province that every individual is free and equal in dignity and rights without regard to his or her race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, social origin, religious creed, religion, age, disability, disfigurement, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, marital status, family status, source of income and political opinion".

## Conclusion

The NLCSW opposes the use of conversion or reparative approaches in social work practice and joins with the Canadian Association of Social Workers in supporting Bill C-6: An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy). Interventions, therapies, or approaches to change or suppress one's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression is not in keeping with the ethics and values of the social work profession and contradicts scientific evidence and human rights. The NLCSW continues to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in social work practice.

## References

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