

# Counselling Regulation, Education, Supervision, and Representation in Canada

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Canada is a geographically large country that includes 10 provinces and three territories. In Canada mental health is regulated at the provincial level. There are currently five Canadian provinces that have regulation for the practice of counselling while the other five provinces and three territories are at varying levels of regulation. There are regulatory bodies at the provincial level with numerous professional associations at both the provincial and national levels. This article outlines the nature of counselling and psychotherapy in Canada, its development and regulation across various provinces, as well as related training opportunities leading to recognition of various professional counsellor titles. In addition to the practice of counselling and psychotherapy, we will also discuss clinical supervision and counsellor education within the Canadian context.

**Keywords:** *Canada, Counselling, Regulation, Education, Representation, Supervision.*

It would not be surprising that at some point during their life a person may have been referred to, or met with, a counsellor. This may have been within an educational institution, a business or employment setting, through community mental health services, or having some removed awareness of this member of the helping profession. The cautious scoping of the counsellor's office in the high school hallway, a life altering call to a helpline, sharing the career reigns while traversing a job loss, seeking an anchor during tumultuous teen angst, or thirsting for a compassionate ear amid personal troubles were perhaps moments when we stepped onto the counsellor's pathway, so they could walk alongside us and offer support and, perhaps, some solutions.

Counselling involves the use of a skillful, ethical, and meaningful therapeutic relationship to bring about emotional growth, self-acceptance, and life enhancing awareness of personal resources that foster resilience. The counsellor is set upon the task of helping people work through developmental challenges, come to terms with life's problems, find ways to enrich important relationships, build strong coping abilities to withstand crisis, open the path to insight and self-knowledge, and

disentangle emotions that fuel inner conflict. Among the many descriptions encapsulating what counsellors do, the current rendering by the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA, 2015) succinctly captures its breadth and scope:

Counselling is a relational process based upon the ethical use of specific professional competencies to facilitate human change. Counselling addresses wellness, relationships, personal growth, career development, mental health, and psychological illness or distress. The counselling process is characterized by the application of recognized cognitive, affective, expressive, somatic, spiritual, developmental, behavioral, learning, and systemic principles.

In Canada, and elsewhere the terms counselling and psychotherapy have traditionally been transposable as both share certain core activities (BACP, 2016; IACP, 2018; Martin, Turcotte, Matte, & Shepard, 2013). Some uphold a distinction between the two terms and the lines of difference are usually demarcated by training, professional focus, or practice setting. It is not uncommon for counselling professionals in Canada to use a number of titles such as: counselling therapist, psychotherapist, mental health therapist, clinical counsellor, career counsellor, vocational guidance counsellor, marriage and family therapist, conseiller/consigliere d'orientation, orienteur, orienteur professionnel, and psychoéducateur (CCPA, 2011). This plethora of title use has caused the collective counsellor identity to be viewed as elusive and unsettled while individual expressions of 'counsellor-ness' are a strong, daily portrayal for many (Gazzola et al., 2010; Gignac & Gazzola, 2016, p. 312). Having a clear professional identity provides those accessing mental health services with a clear understanding of the valuable role, skill set, and approach

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to psychological well-being counsellors offer.

For counsellors in Canada and other countries, knowledge and practice edges often adjoin those of other allied professions such as social work, psychiatry, and clinical psychology making it challenging to highlight the uniqueness of these helpers. A similar overlapping of edges that warrants mention within the Canadian context occurs between counselling psychology and counselling but apparent distinction rests upon academic origins (Sinacore & Ginsberg, 2015). Counsellor education is considered the home of counsellors, while counselling psychology claims roots in psychology with practitioners licensing typically as psychologists. The lines around the counsellor identity are not definitive and as a fairly new profession this will be an evolving process going forward both provincially and nationally as the social, economic, political, and global contexts unfold (Gazzola et al., 2010).

The professional identity of counsellors in Canada has been depicted as a unique amalgam of geopolitical representation, cultural heritage, and pluralistic aspirations that continue to shape the collective persona (Gazzola, 2016). Characteristics identified through a survey of Canadian counsellors by Gazzola and Smith (2007) revealed strong altruistic values, a commitment to personal excellence, the pursuit of success and perpetual growth as key features of their professional identity portrait. Examining how counselling professionals negotiate the identity work process within the Canadian context as regulatory frameworks unfold, Gignac and Gazzola (2016; 2018) found this milieu brought forth a strong sense of agency, craftsmanship in undertaking the identity lifelong project, protean efforts during periods of uncertainty, and a desire to uphold the integrity of their distinctiveness. Counsellor identity in Canada and within each province will certainly continue to evolve against the backdrop of unfolding regulatory initiatives.

The ability of counselling professionals to articulate who they are, their important contribution, the values they uphold and how they are distinct is not unique to the Canadian context. This elusive and uneven recognition subordinating the profession at times (McLaughlin & Boettcher, 2009), causing worrisome diminished relevance amid allied professions (Manthei, 1995), and exacting tireless efforts to uphold core humanistic values (Hansen, 2003) are professional identity challenges confronting counsellors around the globe. Our goal in this chapter is to articulate how counsellors are represented and become qualified professionals ready to serve the needs of clients across Canada.

## Counselling Regulation in Canada

In Canada, the licensing, credentialing, and registration of counsellors is undertaken by provincial regulatory bodies (CCPA, 2013). Although several key mental health professions like social work, psychology, and psychiatry are subject to statutory regulation within each of the Canadian provinces, the counselling profession has not yet achieved the same breadth of implementation. At this time, statutory regulation systems are in place in only five of these provinces or territories (see Table 1). Counsellors outside of these provinces undertake voluntary registration with the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA), which offers qualifying members the Canadian Certified Counsellor (CCC) designation.

**Table 1**  
*Regulatory Status of Counselling in Canada*

Counselling Regulation across Canada		
Regulated	Regulation Activities Underway	Regulation Discussion Pending
Nova Scotia	Newfoundland & Labrador	Yukon
New Brunswick	Prince Edward Island	Nunavut
Quebec	Manitoba	Northwest Territories
Ontario	Saskatchewan	
Alberta	British Columbia	

The province of Nova Scotia has established title protection through the Counselling Therapist Act (2011) which restricts use of Registered Counselling Therapist (RCT) and all derivatives or abbreviations of this (CCPA, 2012). The College of Counselling Therapists (NSCCT) regulates the practice of counselling therapy and has established definitions, professional conduct codes, and oversees matters of professional misconduct or incapacity (NSCCT, 2011).

In New Brunswick, a similar approach to regulation occurred with the implementation of title protection which permits the use of Licensed Counselling Therapist by registered members. The regulatory authority overseeing this is the College of Counselling Therapists of New Brunswick (CCTNB), which received proclamation in 2017 and is working through the initial phase of this process (CCTNB, 2018). The most recent province to regulate counselling is Alberta. The Mental Health Services Protection Act received Royal Assent in December 2018 via Bill 30. The Alberta College of Counselling Therapy (ACCT), part of Alberta's Health Professions Act, was formed to provide oversight, accountability and public protection (FACT-Alberta, 2019).

With full statutory regulation (i.e., title and scope of practice) of counselling in the province of Quebec (i.e., Guidance Counsellor and Vocational Counsellor) counselling professionals are clearly identified and protected. Holding the longest and most comprehensive regulation for the profession, L'Ordre des Conseillers et Conseillieres d'Orientation du Quebec (OCCOQ, 2013) is the college responsible for safeguarding professional conduct and protection of the public. Only members of the OCCOQ are permitted to use the titles: guidance counsellor, vocational guidance counsellor, conseiller d'orientation, and conseillere d'orientation (Government of Quebec, 2013). All professions in Quebec are governed by the Office of Professions du Quebec and within their code, each is distinguished by their scope of practice while benefits are recognized in having shared reserved activities across the mental health field (Martin, Turcotte, Matte, & Shepard, 2013).

In Quebec and Ontario there is statutory regulation for psychotherapy with title protection and practice restrictions. Considered a distinct practice from counselling and spiritual counselling, those wishing to practice psychotherapy in either of these provinces are required to join a college or obtain permits through a provincial order. In Ontario this is the purview of the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO), while in Quebec the issue of permits falls under the remit of the Ordre des psychologues du Quebec (OPQ). Counsellors in Ontario, as of December 2017 are encouraged to verify with the CRPO whether activities they perform fall within the Controlled Act of Psychotherapy and therefore require registration with the regulatory college now that full proclamation has transpired (CRPO, 2017a).

In the five other provinces there are ongoing discussions and initiatives to put regulatory mechanisms in place with some

further along on this route. The Prince Edward Island Counselling Association (PEICA) applied in 2017 to the government for title protection of Registered Counselling Therapist (RCT) under the RHPA (Regulated Health Professions Act) and will be seeking regulation in the near future. The Federation of Associations for Counselling Therapists in British Columbia (FACT-BC) continues to work towards establishing regulation of the profession (CCPA, 2017). In the three territories, these discussions have not seen a similar level of commitment or progress.

### Counselling Representation in Canada

Canada is the largest North American country, spanning roughly ten million square kilometers (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Although Canada is a large territory, second only to Russia in geographical size, its population is relatively modest. Canada is a country that is just shy of 38 million people (Statistics Canada, 2020). Canada is part of the Commonwealth and a parliamentary democracy. The responsibility for lawmaking in Canada is shared among one federal, ten provincial and three territorial governments” (House of Commons, 2000). In Canada, mental health is regulated at the provincial level.

The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA), which was formed in 1965, is the oldest national association for professionally trained counsellors and now has close to 7,000 members. Its mandate is to provide leadership and promote the counselling profession in Canada. Individuals are eligible to become a Canadian Certified Counsellor (CCC) if they hold a university degree at the graduate or doctoral level in counselling or a related field that meets the professional standards and ethics of the CCPA. A qualified professional must also become a member of the CCPA before applying for certification.

Within the national association there are sixteen chapters that focus on different areas of specialization or timely issues related to the profession (e.g., counsellor educators and supervisors chapter, creative arts, social justice, spirituality, school counsellors, Indigenous circle, and private practice). The CCPA also facilitates certification of counsellors and supervisors, offers live and online professional development courses or webinars, offers accreditation of counselling programs, and hosts an annual national conference.

Another nationally recognized, self-regulated association for counsellors is the Canadian Professional Counsellors Association (CPCA), which was founded in 1990. Individuals must meet competency-based criteria for membership as a Registered Professional Counsellor (RPC) or as Master Practitioners in Clinical Counselling (MPCC). The CPCA approves several education providers and is dedicated to promoting the professionalism of counsellors.

### Pathways to Becoming a Counsellor in Canada

A great place to begin on the counsellor pathway is with a bachelor’s degree as it prepares individuals for entry to a variety of counselling career choices. Whether coming to the counselling profession after a previous career or directly from an undergraduate program like psychology, education, or social work the pursuit of graduate level studies is typically required for professional practice (see Figure 1). Options for specialized

areas of counselling work such as school counselling, private practice, or family and couples work may be part of graduate study programs or obtained through ongoing professional development.

### Counselling Education in Canada

Those interested in becoming counsellors in Canada must hold an undergraduate degree in education, psychology, or an equivalent to pursue graduate level studies. A master level degree in counselling, psychology, or social work is the minimum educational requirement for certification, registration, and licensing in most provinces in Canada (CCPA, 2013). School counsellors are also required to be qualified teachers in most jurisdictions. There is great variability in the standards and delivery of counsellor education in Canada precisely due to academic training being a provincial responsibility (Gazzola, 2015).

Graduate studies in counselling are traditionally situated within education faculties of universities in Canada rather than in psychology departments despite their shared historical roots (Young & Nichol, 2007). They are either referred to as counselling psychology or educational counselling programs and vary from 14 months to two years in duration. There are several universities across Canada that offer graduate level studies for those pursuing a general counselling degree or with a specialized focus (e.g., art therapy, marriage and family, psychotherapy, and spirituality) as outlined on the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association website (CCPA, 2018b) (see Table 2). Four of these universities have program accreditation from the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) while several other academic institutions hold accreditation with the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) at the graduate and doctoral level for their counselling psychology programs (Gazzola, 2016).

**Table 2**  
*Graduate-Level Academic and Professional Counsellor Training Programs Across Canada*

Province	University
Alberta	Athabasca University; City University; St. Stephen’s College; University of Alberta; University of Calgary; University of Lethbridge
British Columbia	Adler School of Professional Psychology; City University; Gonzaga University; Simon Fraser University; University of British Columbia; Trinity Western University; University of Northern British Columbia; University of Victoria
Manitoba	Brandon University; Université de Sainte-Boniface; University of Manitoba; University of Winnipeg; Providence Theological Seminary
New Brunswick	Université de Moncton; University of New Brunswick; Yorkville University
Newfoundland	Memorial University of Newfoundland
Nova Scotia	Acadia University
Ontario	Saint Paul University; University of Western Ontario; University of Guelph; University of Ottawa; University of Toronto; Wilfred Laurier University; C; Christian College & School of Graduate Theological Studies; Tyndale Seminary
Québec	Concordia University; McGill University; Université de Laval; Université de Montréal; Université de Québec à Montréal; Université de Québec à Rimou; Université de Québec à Trois-Rivières; Université de Sherbrooke; Université de Québec en Abitibi-Temiscamingue; Université du Québec en Outaouais

\* Source: Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (2018b)

Masters-level programs in counselling are generally offered as a Master of Counselling / Counselling Psychology (M.A. or M.C.) with a thesis requirement or the Master of Education (M.Ed.) which is a terminal degree for professional practice (CCPA, 2018b). For those entering a master's in counselling psychology program, a 4-year B.A. in psychology (honors) is necessary and the completion of pre-requisite courses in psychology (abnormal, developmental, personality), statistics, research design, and basic counselling skills. A master's in educational counselling program often does not require an honors B.A. in psychology but may call for similar pre-requisite courses upon entry (Government of Canada, 2018). Students can also complete their graduate studies in counselling through two online programs that combine online coursework with a practicum-based experience. The first is Yorkville University, which offers a Counselling Psychology (M.A.) program and the second option is the Counselling (M.C.) at Athabasca University.

The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) has worked steadfastly to set standards and procedures for accreditation of counselling programs in Canada. The Council on Accreditation of Counsellor Education Programs (CACEP) is the body responsible for overseeing the accreditation process, which was established in 1987 to ensure quality, consistent training. Counsellor education programs are required to achieve established standards of CACEP within their institutional setting, ensure certain program content and objectives are met, provide quality practicum experiences, adhere to student selection and advising protocols, and attend to faculty qualifications, instructional support, and self-evaluation in master's level programs (Robertson & Borgen, 2016). There are currently four universities in Canada that hold CACEP accreditation for their counselling programs (see Table 3).

**Table 3**  
*CACEP Accredited Master's Level Counselling Programs in Canada*

University and Year of Accreditation
University of British Columbia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>M.A. Counselling Psychology (2006)</li> <li>M.Ed. Counselling Psychology (2006)</li> </ul>
Acadia University
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>M.Ed. in Counselling (2009)</li> </ul>
Trinity Western University
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>M.A. Counselling Psychology (2012)</li> </ul>
University of Victoria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>M.A. Counselling Psychology, Thesis Route (2017)</li> <li>M.A. Counselling Psychology, Project Based (2017)</li> </ul>

## Counselling Supervision in Canada

Clinical supervision is an important requirement for counsellors in Canada and one which has historically been

conducted by experienced clinicians with varying degrees of formal training (Johnson & Stewart, 2000). This apprenticeship approach has increasingly come under review (Peake, Nussbaum, & Tindell, 2002; Watkins, 2012) and the move toward solidifying more formal, compulsory training for supervisors has gained international momentum (Milne & James, 2002; Scott, Ingram, Vitanza, & Smith, 2000). A similar shift toward mandatory training through accredited counselling programs or at the behest of regulatory colleges overseeing the mental health professions has begun to take shape in Canada (Hunsley & Barker, 2011).

Clinical supervision is provided to counsellors-in-training as part of their degree completion and also to supervisors-in-training, often at the doctoral level while they establish supervision competency. These are the primary levels of competency formation being addressed across the mental health field within accredited programs and by professional associations (e.g., Canadian Psychological Association, Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association). Both the provision of clinical oversight and training of supervisors within academic settings remains uneven, under evaluated, and emergent as core requirements across provincial jurisdictions are independently established in the Canadian context (Hadjistavropoulos, Kehler, & Hajistavropoulos, 2010).

This desire to articulate the academic training requirements during degree capture and forward into perpetuity through continuing education for clinicians has been recently evidenced in the province of Quebec. Clinicians providing counselling and psychotherapy services in Quebec following passage of Bill 21 by the National Assembly of Quebec (2009) will now be required to have completed six hours of supervision training to demonstrate competency if not obtained during post-doctoral training and ongoing mandatory continuing education. This move has set precedent for supervision to become a specialty area beyond counselling and psychotherapy practice (Gonsalvez & Milne, 2010), which in time may move Canada closer to international supervision standards. In particular, the requirement for supervision of supervision by other professional associations like the British Association of Counsellors (1996) which has shown merit in approaching protection of the public and perhaps elevating professional credibility (Wheeler & King, 2000).

This shift in the view of clinical supervision occurring well beyond the formal training periods of clinicians requires a solid grounding in research evidence to delineate competencies and build capacity to support this endeavor (DeAngelis, 2014). Preliminary steps toward this longer-term objective are evidenced by a recent move in the province of Ontario to make formal training of supervisor's mandatory. According to the College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (2017b) a supervisor must possess five or more years of experience in the practice of psychotherapy and demonstrate competence as well as completing 30 hours of directed learning in clinical supervision (i.e., course work, supervised practice as a supervisor, individual/peer/group learning, or independent study). Not only are provincial regulatory bodies like the CRPO starting to establish guidelines to mandate supervisory training in lieu of lifelong requisites, there is another broader movement underway for counselling supervision in Canada.

At the national level the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) has established the Canadian Certified Counsellor – Supervisor (CCC-S) designation to credential professional supervision competency (CCPA,

2018a). The requirements for obtaining the CCC-S designation include:

- CCC Designation – Canadian Certified Counsellor in good standing with CCPA
- Attestation – ethical and professional conduct, commitment to CCPA Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, possession of professional liability insurance, annual documentation of continuing education and clinical supervision requirements
- Clinical Experience – minimum of 5 years post-graduate degree clinical experience within the last 10 years [800 hours / year]
- Employment History and Supervision Training – providing documentation summaries
- Supervision Experience – evidence of provision of 20 hours minimum clinical supervision over last two years or equivalent supervisory designation from another recognized professional association
- Supervision Education – confirmation of graduate level training in supervision
- Annual Renewal – CE credits and supervision practice hours

With the aim of promoting the professional credibility of clinical supervisors, the CCPA is working to establish a recognized national credential of professional supervision and build capacity for quality professional development opportunities both online and at national conferences. Graduate-level courses in clinical supervision are offered at the introductory, intermediate, and advanced levels to support annual renewal requirements, which includes twelve hours of documented supervision work and four continuing education credits in the area of clinical supervision (CCPA, 2018a). The current movement toward establishing supervisory competencies and training requirements will undoubtedly influence not only professional development but also the unfolding identity of counsellors in Canada (Gazzola & De Stefano, 2016).

## Concluding Remarks

In Canada, as in other countries around the globe, there is considerable overlap between the work of counsellors and that of other allied mental health professionals. Within counselling, there are numerous occupational titles that are used (e.g., guidance counsellor, counselling therapist, mental health counsellor, etc.). Counselling and psychotherapy are becoming increasingly regulated in Canada, a process that falls under the jurisdiction of provincial governments. The province of Quebec has the most comprehensive statutory regulation of counselling (i.e., guidance counsellor / vocational guidance counsellor) with several other provinces in various stages of statutory regulation underway. Both Quebec and Ontario currently regulate “psychotherapy,” which is considered distinct to counselling in those provinces.

One of the cornerstones to counselling practice is clinical supervision. In the past supervision mainly occurred within the educational process, specifically during the master’s-level counselling practica that most counselling programs require. Further, the typical supervisor has traditionally been a seasoned practitioner whose qualifications as a supervisor have been exclusively years of practice as a counsellor. This has been gradually shifting and the requirements for becoming a supervisor now include some formal training in clinical

supervision in addition to a minimum number of years in the field practicing as a counsellor. In general, counselling, and to some degree supervision, is increasingly becoming regulated in Canada. Because mental health falls under the jurisdiction of the provinces, counselling regulation currently exists at varying levels across Canada and the regulatory process is a dynamic one.

## Bio

**Nicola Gazzola** is a Professor of counselling psychology at the University of Ottawa. He is a licensed psychologist (Quebec) and has 25 years of clinical experience. His research interests are in the area of professional issues in counselling and psychotherapy and include professional identity of counselling and clinical supervision. His research team is currently investigating the therapist use-of-self in counselling and psychotherapy.

**Kate Gignac** earned her PhD from the University of Ottawa and is a Canadian Certified Counsellor (CCC) and a Certified Counsellor Supervisor (CCC-S). Her research centers on professional identity formation, clinical supervision, the articulation of identity work, place of values and religiosity in identity narratives, and the nexus of exogenous events with professional becoming.

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