

Integrating Workforce Competencies for Substance Use Health

youth
wellness
hubs
ONTARIO

carrefours
bien-être
pour les jeunes
DE L'ONTARIO

The **Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA)** has developed an integrated competency framework for both regulated and unregulated professionals that outlines essential knowledge and skills for substance use health.¹ This includes:

- **Technical competencies:** the “**what**” of a job or “**hard**” skills such as understanding substance use, supporting families/caregivers, knowledge of co-occurring conditions, screening and assessment, motivational interviewing, and knowledge of community systems
- **Behavioral competencies:** the “**how**” of performing a job such as culturally safe care, interpersonal rapport, person centered approaches, and trauma informed care.



To learn more about Integrating Workforce Competencies for Substance Use Health, check out [Understanding the Competencies](#)



Together, these competencies support evidenced-based care and enhanced professionalism and consistency of practice in the substance use field.¹

Benefits of competencies¹:

- Identifies **knowledge and skills** for the substance use workforce and allied professionals
- Provides a **shared framework** for clinicians, educators, and organizations
- **Enhances service quality and relational care** in youth settings
- Builds **leadership capacity** and **professional development** by clarifying roles and supporting progression from foundational to advanced practice
- Competency based framework not only supports the **delivery of services**, but also the **culture** within which we deliver those services



Outlines essential knowledge and skills for a role within specific field



Guiding model for recruitment and retention practices



Contains tools and resources to standardize leadership and professional development practice

Competency Based Framework²



Practical Considerations for Clinicians:

- **Start slowly** by choosing a few competencies most relevant to your context and use that as a starting point
- Try to intentionally **pair technical and behavioral competencies**. For example, when performing screening and assessment, ensure it is trauma-informed and culturally safe
- Expect **non-linear stages of change** and remain flexible and creative when working with youth
- **Reflect and self-assess** by using the [progressive proficiency tables](#) and [job clusters](#) to map out your own competencies
- Utilize the competencies framework and its associated tools to **support leadership development** to better influence system change and cultural change within organizations

References

1. Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (n.d.). Understanding the competencies. Workforce Competencies. <https://competencies.ccsa.ca/en/understanding-competencies>
2. Hernandez-Basurto, A.M. (2025, July 15) Substance Use Practice Series: Integrating Substance Use Health Competencies into Mental Health Services & Supports [Virtual Learning Event, Powerpoint]. Canadiant Centre on Substance Use and Addiction

Content adapted from a presentation by Miguel Andres Hernandez-Basurto, Senior Knowledge Broker at CCSA titled Integrating Substance Use Health Competencies into Mental Health Services & Supports.

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