

May 14, 2020

Dr. Robert Strang
Chief Medical Officer of Health
PO Box 488, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 2R8
robert.strang@novascotia.ca

Dear Dr. Strang:

We are aware that Dr. Fred French, Chair of the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology (NSBEP) has communicated their regulatory position on the protection of the public during the COVID-19 pandemic to the Health Workforce Planning and Regulatory Affairs Division of the Department of Health and Wellness. We strongly support NSBEP's position on this matter and would like to add our voice to highlight the important role of individual psychologists as the government manages the return to the workplace.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, under the direction provided by the Nova Scotia Health Protection Act, most psychologists are no longer conducting in-person appointments other than those determined to be of an urgent nature. To ensure that their existing clients and new clients who need support during the pandemic receive the necessary treatment, many psychologists have moved to a telepsychology delivery model, relying on phone or secure online technology for "face-to-face" contact with clients.

Although telepsychology works well in the short-term and for some cases, it does not provide all the services that the public needs or wants, particularly in light of the added stress of the pandemic and traumatic events that occurred in April. In addition to those who simply prefer in-person interaction, telepsychology may not be possible for therapeutic or logistical reasons (lack of privacy or technical difficulties), or for those persons for whom phone or online treatment is either inadequate or inconsistent with features of their clinical condition.

The situation is even more challenging with assessment services that have standardized administration procedures that require in-person contact. For example, those involving psychometric procedures that require close face-to-face contact to perform pencil-and-paper or stimulus-manipulation tasks.

We are requesting that as you develop your plan to manage Nova Scotians' return to work that you keep in the mind the importance of psychological treatments and assessments as an essential service to a significant number of Nova Scotians, now more than ever, and also consider the unique issues that affect how psychologists work.

Psychologists fully support the current guidelines that have been put in place for physical distancing, protective equipment, and personal and workplace hygiene. Many psychologists have already adapted their practices to be in compliance with these guidelines, and are anxious to return to offering full in-person treatment and assessment services as soon as possible.

However, we would like to see more specific recommendations from the province to allow all psychologists to return to in-person practice (i.e. wearing masks, plexiglass dividers, modalities to sanitize assessment tools, and managing office spaces that do not permit 6-foot physical distancing).

We would be pleased to be included in any discussion that would help ensure that psychologists are given the opportunity to serve the public safely with optimal clinical interventions for those with mental illness including specific additional recommendations for the safe return to in-person practice.

Sincerely,



Jeannette Kennedy, R.Psych., President
Association of Psychologists of Nova Scotia

Copy to: *The Honourable Stephen MacNeil, Premier of Nova Scotia, PREMIER@novascotia.ca*