

Consultation report

March 2024

Updating the competencies for general registration

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Background

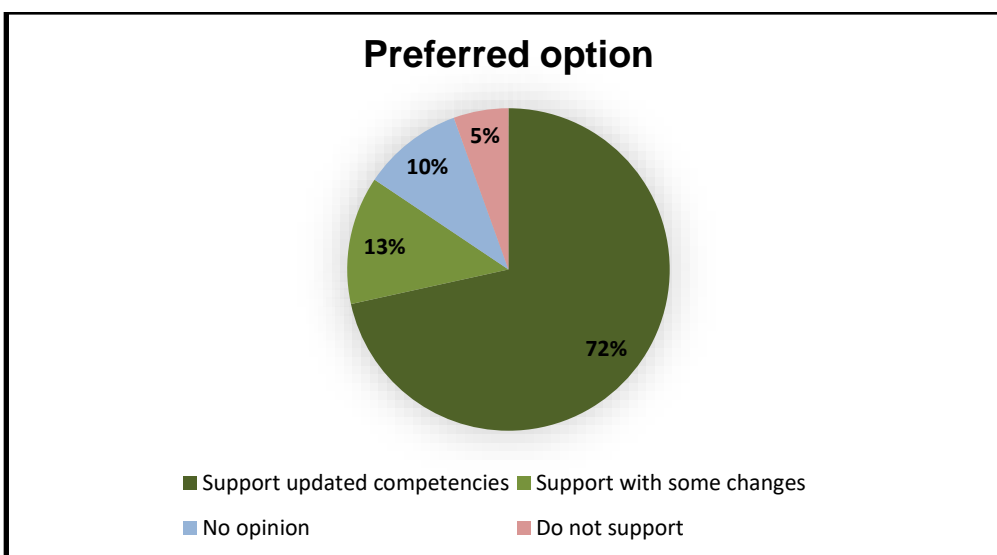
1. The Psychology Board of Australia (the Board) is consulting on updating the competencies for general registration as a psychologist in Australia as part of the [Education and training reform](#) (ETR) program of work.
2. Preliminary consultation on our proposal was held between 3 February and 31 March 2022 with targeted stakeholders. Public consultation was held between 10 February and 11 April 2023. The proposed competencies, guidance documents and a recording of our webinar all provide background to the proposal and can be found at [past consultations](#).
3. We have carefully considered all feedback. We would like to thank the many individuals, organisations and professional associations who thoughtfully reviewed the proposal and provided feedback to our public consultation. This report summarises the feedback received from this wide-ranging consultation and provides information about how these responses are being considered in the development of the updated competencies.

Submissions

4. A total of 111 submissions were received from 38 organisations and 73 individuals. Twenty-three submissions were received during preliminary consultation, and 88 submissions received during public consultation. Overall, seventy-seven stakeholders completed the online consultation survey (providing brief feedback), and 34 provided detailed feedback using the submission template.
5. Submissions that have been approved for publication can be reviewed [here](#). Submissions that were received at preliminary (confidential) consultation, via the online consultation survey form, or were out of scope of the consultation are not published. For this consultation, a high number of stakeholders requested that their submissions remain confidential and not be published.
6. Submissions were received from regulatory stakeholders (e.g., government, health ombudsman), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists and organisations, consumers, psychology stakeholder organisations (e.g., Australian Psychology Accreditation Council; Professional Associations), and individual psychologists and provisional psychologists.

Preferred option

7. Stakeholders were asked if they preferred to continue with the current competencies for general registration (published in 2010) or to adopt the *draft Professional competencies for psychologists*.
8. A clear majority of submissions (85%) supported the proposal to update the competencies for general registration, with 10% of submissions not expressing a clear opinion one way or the other and only six individuals indicating they did not support the proposed update.



9. Many stakeholders noted that updating the competencies would have positive long-term impacts on clients stemming from the improved clarity of benchmarks and clear requirements for psychological practice.
10. In support of the proposal to update the competencies, stakeholders emphasised that the competencies need to be refreshed to remain contemporary, to incorporate essential elements that are currently missing (e.g. self-care, reflexive practice), to strengthen cultural safety in line with the changes to the [National Law](#) including paramountcy of public protection and the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, and to improve alignment with international benchmarks.

Feedback on the new structure and organisation of the competencies

11. Our proposal included improvements and changes to the structure and organisation of the competencies. As can be seen from Table 1 there was support or strong support for all proposals.

Table1: Feedback on the proposed structure and organisation of the competencies

Proposal	Strong support	Support	Mixed support	Did not support
Collating all the competencies into one document				
Aligning the competencies with international psychology regulators				
Emphasising that the competencies are interconnected (holistic approach)				
Introducing the term 'threshold professional competency'				
Writing the competencies at a high level so they can be applied to all psychologists regardless of where they work				
Including a preamble and definition section into the competency document to provide guidance				
Updating the drafting approach to include action verbs and plain English to ensure the competencies are helpful, clear, relevant and workable				
Combining the current <i>Knowledge of the discipline</i> (Competency 1), and <i>Research and evaluation</i> (Competency 5) into a new competency: <i>Applies scientific knowledge of psychology to inform safe and effective practice</i> (updated Competency 1)				
Placing an intentional focus on professional reflexivity, deliberate practice and self-care (updated C3).				
Amending and expanding the competencies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety (updated C7).				
Expanding the competency on working with people from diverse groups, including demonstrating cultural responsiveness (updated C8).				

12. Some stakeholders suggested improvements to the preamble and definition section of the *draft Professional competencies for psychologists*. In response, we will make the following changes:
 - a. Update the preamble to provide more explanation and clarity about what the 'holistic approach' means in practice
 - b. Update the definition of 'client' to include research participants, and to better align with the definition that is being proposed in the [draft Code of Conduct](#), and
 - c. Update the definition section to include several cultural safety terms that are used in the competency document that are not currently included in the definitions section (e.g. trauma-aware care, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples).

Feedback on the eight competencies

13. There was widespread support for the updated eight competencies, with no stakeholders suggesting additional competencies or recommending we remove any of the proposed competencies.
14. Stakeholders suggested some improvements to the competency titles and their descriptors to increase clarity. We will incorporate the following changes into the *Professional competencies for psychologists* before publication:
 - a. Adding digital health competency into the preamble and Competency 6 to better address the increasing use of telehealth, web-based interventions and digital practice-management systems
 - b. Including additional information about neurodiversity into Competency 8 to clarify our requirements regarding disability and cognitive capacity (listed in C8.1) and to better support clients with intellectual disability and autism (for example)
 - c. Switching the order of Competency 7 and 8 to improve readability and allow the reader to move from general competencies for working with diverse individuals and groups to working specifically with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, families and communities
 - d. Strengthening working with carers and families, and including those with lived experience into the broader work context in line with recommendations from recent mental health reviews and royal commissions, and
 - e. Some minor wording changes to improve clarity and readability of the titles and descriptors.
15. Some stakeholders suggested changes to the competencies that we have decided not to incorporate. After careful review, the changes we decided not to make include:
 - a. wording changes that reduce the clarity of the competency (e.g. including definitions and examples within the competency descriptors)
 - b. suggestions that were not in line with the high-level approach (e.g., making the competencies more operational)
 - c. suggestions that were only relevant to providing direct client care, or were only relevant to a specific client group, and
 - d. suggestions that were not in line with the holistic approach (e.g., repeating a competency descriptor from one competency into another).

Feedback on transitioning to the updated competencies

16. We have proposed to publish the updated competencies when they are approved, but to have a future date of effect at least twelve months later that is aligned with the annual date of renewal. We consulted on a proposed date of effect of 1 December 2024. Feedback showed the following:
 - a. Stakeholders are strongly in support of aligning the date of effect with the renewal period as this will assist psychologists to plan and complete any required continuing professional development (CPD).

- b. All stakeholders supported a transition period, with some requesting a longer timeframe.
- c. An overwhelming majority of stakeholders supported the proposed transition plan to incorporate the updated competencies into the Board documents, including the Provisional and General registration standards, and the 4+2 guidelines. Feedback also supported the proposed plan for incorporating the updated competencies into the 5+1 internship and the national psychology exam (as outlined in Table 2, p.21 of the [Consultation paper](#)).

Extending the transition timeframe

- 17. Several stakeholders mentioned the short-term impacts inherent in the change management process of transitioning to the updated competencies. While most stakeholders viewed these transition tasks as manageable, some suggested that a longer transition timeframe would assist higher education providers to update their course curriculum and support psychologists to self-assess against the updated competencies and undertake any necessary CPD.
- 18. We have decided to provide additional support by extending the transition period and providing a later date of effect. Confirmation of transition timeframes will be published when finalised.

Providing guidance to help operationalise the competencies

- 19. Like the current competencies, the updated competencies have been written at a high (or macro) level, so that they are applicable to all the contexts where psychologists work. Psychologists work in a variety of direct client care contexts, as well as in management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory or policy development roles.
- 20. Most stakeholders communicated their support for this high-level approach, believing that the competency document provides clear expectations while being flexible enough to be applied to the various psychology work contexts. Feedback noted that the removal of lists (for example) has improved clarity and makes the competencies easier to understand and therefore implement.
- 21. Several psychology stakeholders however, requested more detail about how to operationalise the competencies in their scope of practice, particularly about the new Competency 3 (reflexivity, deliberate practice and self-care) and updated Competency 8 (cultural safety and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, families and communities).
- 22. While we cannot operationalise the competencies for every individual psychologist's scope of practice (there are currently over 44,000 provisional and general psychologists), we can provide some additional guidance about the meaning of the competencies and our requirements¹.
- 23. In response to this feedback, we will develop additional resources and publish them alongside the *Professional competencies for psychologists* to assist psychologists to better understand how to self-assess against the competencies, and to provide guidance on cultural safety, cultural responsiveness, reflexivity, purposeful and deliberate practice and self-care.

Ensuring cultural safety

- 24. Stakeholders provided overwhelming support for strengthening the requirements for cultural safety in the updated competencies, and for the proposal to divide the current 'Working with diverse groups competency' into two new competencies with one focusing on working with First Nations Peoples and demonstrating cultural safety, and the other focusing on working with diverse groups and demonstrating cultural responsiveness.
- 25. There was a clear indication that stakeholders are committed to ensuring a culturally safe implementation of the competencies. We will continue to partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and other key stakeholders to support this transition.

¹ For the latest registration numbers see our [statistics](#).

Next steps

26. The next steps in our consultation process are to incorporate your feedback into the *Professional competencies for psychologists* and seek Ministerial approval to remove the current competencies from the [Provisional and General registration standards](#). We will also begin work on developing the additional resources and guidance documents to assist psychologists operationalise the competencies in their scope of practice.
27. Once all documents have been approved and deemed fit-for-purpose we will confirm the date of effect of the competencies, and publish them at least twelve months prior to this date of effect. The current competencies for general registration will continue to be used until the updated competencies take effect. Updates about our progress on these tasks will be provided in our [Connections newsletter](#) and on our [website](#).