

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What do social workers do?

- Social work is defined within the Social Workers Act as the assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and evaluation of individual, interpersonal, and societal issues through the use of social work knowledge, skills, interventions, and strategies, to assist individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations, and communities to achieve optimum psychological and social functioning.

How are social workers regulated?

- The title “social worker” is regulated under the Social Workers Act (not the Health Professions Act), and social workers are registered with the British Columbia College of Social Workers (BCCSW). There are many exemptions to this “right to title”. To work in health authorities, social workers must be registered with the BCCSW.
- The BCCSW offers two registration categories: Registered Social Worker (RSW) and Registered Clinical Social Worker (RCSW)
 - RSW – may hold either a BSW or MSW degree
 - RCSW – must have a MSW degree along with 3000 clinical hours
- The BCCSW identifies one activity restricted to RCSWs, which is the ability to independently diagnose people with mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders using the DSM-5.

Why was the competency document developed?

- Registered social workers are in high demand across the health care system in British Columbia, particularly in primary care, mental health, and other priority areas.
- Health authorities currently use education level (BSW or MSW) as a definitive tool for hiring RSWs rather than considering competencies gained through experience and training.
- The use of education level as the primary criteria when hiring RSWs into health care settings has created confusion for hiring managers.
- Recently, the employer-controlled requirement of hiring social workers who have a MSW degree for certain positions has been challenged through union grievances by BSW degree holders who have the competencies to perform the job. These grievances have been awarded to the grievors who hold BSW degrees and possess “advanced practice” skills through additional training and work experience.
- All of these issues have identified the need to clarify social worker competencies and to look at how an individual fits the hiring need, considering the competencies they possess.

What is the purpose of the social work competency document?

- Provide clarity regarding RSW competencies and required training to support care;
- Identify care activities that RSWs provide within team-based health care settings;
- Highlight relevant legislation related to the care activities that RSWs perform;
- Outline the education and training of RSWs;
- Help inform inclusive and equitable health human resource planning and recruitment practices of RSWs across the province based on competencies;
- Be used as a tool to guide the interview and hiring process, in consultation with a social work professional practice lead (where available);
- Support RSWs in understanding and maintaining their individual competencies.

What is the difference between a BSW and MSW-trained RSWs in health care?

- Currently there is no regulatory distinction regarding the hiring, duties, or what may be identified as advanced practice between a BSW or a MSW-trained social worker. At entry to practice, there is a difference in the knowledge and skill set of a BSW-trained social worker and a MSW-trained social worker.
- Most health authorities have agreed that a BSW degree is the entry level requirement for practice and that an MSW degree is required for roles that require more advanced practice skills.
- The differences between a BSW-trained social worker and an MSW-trained social worker may recede the longer a BSW-trained social worker practices and engages in additional training.

Should I hire a BSW or MSW?

- The decision to hire a BSW or MSW practitioner should be made in consultation with practice or social work leaders.
- Hiring considerations should include the population needs, level of complexity of the Person and the knowledge and skills required to meet these needs, the availability and level of social work clinical supervision and formal/informal peer mentorship.