



Annual Report

Nova Scotia College of Counselling Therapists

2021

Tenth Anniversary of Proclamation

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Welcome and Report from the Outgoing Board Chair

On this 10th anniversary of the proclamation of the *Counselling Therapists Act*, which brought the college into existence, I want to begin by saying thank-you. As the psychological and emotional impact of Covid-19 continued to diminish the mental health of Nova Scotians in 2021, Registered Counselling Therapists played an indispensable role in supporting an already overwhelmed mental health care system. It was you and your work that sustained and gave hope to so many during the most challenging months of this year. Even with the threat of the delta variant, we continue to forge forward with humility, determination, and confidence.

Likewise, your Board of Directors with our new Executive Director & Registrar (EDR), John Hubert, have been working diligently to gain the confidence of the government and Nova Scotians. We began the year by seeking your feedback on the updated General Bylaws and continued new policy development. Our first major hurdle was to align our registration policies and practices with the requirements of the *Fair Registration Practices Act* (FRPA). Our non-compliance with the FRPA was first revealed during a review beginning in 2018. FRPA had to be made an urgent priority of the Board in 2021 to ensure that we devoted enough time and energy to bring the College up to the required legal standard. Fortunately, the College was able to hire an EDR who is a former Dalhousie University professor with over 20 years of policy development and government relations expertise. Within a few short months, the College was compliant with all but one very minor committee training issue to be resolved in 2022. The government response to this dramatic turnaround was one of praise and congratulations. Our next FRPA review will be in 2025.

In late January, at the same time we were working toward FRPA compliance, the Department of Health & Wellness (DHW) gave the Board formal notice that we would be entering a period of enhanced scrutiny to ensure that the College focuses efforts on its public interest mandate and that the Board adopts good governance

best practices and NSRHPN standards. Since January we have been required to provide the DHW with regular reports on progress toward better governance and mandate compliance.

To assist new Board members as they begin their work for the College, we have arranged specialized training in governance that will help increase Board effectiveness and add to DHW's confidence in us going forward.

We had to say goodbye to Brittany Snow, our Administrative Coordinator, in July as she left to pursue her academic goals. Brittany was instrumental in reshaping our financial system in addition to her typical duties. She will be missed. We have welcomed Mary Kate Jollymore as our new administrative coordinator.

In closing, we have focussed on improving and increasing the College's communication and transparency through email updates, a new semi-annual newsletter, published Board minutes, and by holding public Board meetings. I'm also excited that we are approaching the launch of our new mandate-compliant public access registry.

A special thanks to our EDR, Board of Directors and all committee members for their amazing work this year and of course to all RCTs -- for all you have done for the well-being of Nova Scotians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Wohlmuth', written in a cursive style.

Ed Wohlmuth, MEd, RCT, CCC

Chair, Board of Directors

Executive Director and Registrar Report

This past year has been a time of continued growth and maturation for the College. We've grown in numbers and we continue to mature as we align ourselves with new and evolving best-practices in the field of regulatory board governance. We've been encouraged by government to continue in our resolve to focus efforts and resources on public interest and protection by modernizing the College. This is an on-going project that incorporates a set of standards for regulators established by the Nova Scotia Regulated Health Professions Network ("the Network").

Through a concerted effort to enhance the transparency, objectivity and fairness of our registration practices we have now achieved full compliance with the *Fair Registration Practices Act* (FRPA). Although the process was arduous at times it has helped make us better at what do and strengthened the confidence of government. At a recent meeting with the DHW the College received high praise for our efforts over the past year in demonstrating the ability to govern the profession in the public interest. That being said, it was also made clear that we will be expected to remain on our current course and for that reason we will continue to be required to report activities of the Board on a quarterly basis throughout 2022.

Since the last AGM the College's policy regime has been revised and expanded, application and registration processes have been streamlined, financial systems strengthened and standardized, an Entry-to-Practice Competency Profile has been adopted, and the new public access registry is near completion (despite a few unforeseen technical delays). The College website has been overhauled to better highlight its public interest mandate, to give applicants easier access to the process and to make it easier for members of the public to file a complaint. As part of the website redesign, registrants (including supervisors and candidates) now have self-serve access to an array of forms to speed service. Likewise, the biannual newsletter has been refocused to provide information pertaining specifically to the regulatory functions of the College, and has recently be lauded by the DHW as an exemplar for

health regulators in the province.

To enhance the long-term sustainability of various organizational functions, the College has taken the business approach that arrangement between the College and other institutions/organizations/businesses are more secure over time than those between the College and individuals. This can be seen in the move from an independent bookkeeper to a well-established professional accounting firm and in the Memorandum of Agreement signed with Acadia to provide assistance with practicum bridging and course offerings. In the spring of 2022 Acadia will also begin to offer introductory and intermediate Candidacy Supervision Education in collaboration with the College.

In the coming months, use of a Skills-Knowledge-Attributes Matrix pilot tested by the Policy Committee will be adapted for use in selecting future committee and board members as we move toward a merit-based selection system. Results of a Recent Candidate Exit Survey will be released, as will the results of a random audit of Advertising and Self-Representation on RCT websites. There is also training planned for the Board and for the Complaints, Professional Conduct and Registration Appeals Committees.

Most notably, the College will be working to develop a Mission, Vision and Values framework that will form the basis of strategic planning activities that will determine the direction of the College over the next five to ten years and serve as a guide for year-to-year priority setting and self-assessment. The College will make use of external expertise to direct the process and to help determine the best way to engage registrants and the public in this important exercise.

I also want to echo Ed's sentiment of gratitude to everyone who worked so hard through a very trying period of uncertainty in the world to support their clients and the work of the College.

Respectfully.



John Hubert
Executive Director and Registrar

Update on 2020 Plans and Priorities

Heightened expectations of the public, government and other stakeholders means increasing accountability for regulators to provide evidence of statutory compliance and that best practices are being followed. At last year's AGM the Board committed to three **priority issues** designed to support three on-going **strategic goals**.

Strategic Goals

- To Maintain a Clear and Focused Commitment to Our Public-Interest Mandate and Governance Best Practices
- To Regain the Confidence of Government in Our Ability to Self-Regulate the Profession
- To Establish NSCCT as a Model of Self-Governance Among Nova Scotia Health Regulators

2020 Priority Issues

Board priorities over the past year have been focused largely on realizing the commitments made at the 2020 AGM to:

1. Ensure that all regulatory policies, processes, services and programs are clear, fair, transparent, effective and efficient.

Update: Meeting the regulatory standards of the *Fair Registration Practices Act* (FRPA) was a priority issue for the College for all of 2020 and the first half of 2021.

The purpose of the *Act* and the review process are to ensure that all regulators in the province of Nova Scotia use registration practices that are transparent, objective, impartial and procedurally fair.

2. Ensure that concerns and complaints are dealt with in an efficient and fair manner.

Update: The primary legislative mandate of the NSCCT is to ensure the public is protected when seeking or utilizing the professional services of Registered Counselling Therapists in Nova Scotia. The EDR, Complaints Committee and Professional Conduct Committee are jointly involved in receiving, triaging, investigating and resolving complaints regarding the conduct and competence of RCTs and RCT-Cs. A *laissez faire* or registrant-focused approach to complaints is untenable to government and a direct breach of our public protection mandate. High levels of confidentiality must also be maintained throughout the process. The Board is committed to persisting in its work to enhance capacity to conduct thorough and timely investigations and review of complaints. To this end, the Board approved a new \$30,000 budget line to fund the hiring of professional investigators as required.

3. Ensure that the activities and decisions of the Board on behalf of the College are open and transparent.

Update: The Board has made significant progress on last year's commitment to enhance transparency of its activities. This includes, 1) publishing of all Board and Executive Committee minutes on Guild following their final approval, and 2) opening all Board meetings to registrants and the general public via MS Teams, and 3) establishing a formal *Conflict of Interest Policy* for Board members to compliment last year's introduction of the Board's first *Code of Conduct*.

Plans and Priorities for the Coming Year

While continuing to build on the progress made throughout 2021, the Board will undertake a new set of priority issues and commitments to:

1. Create a long-term *vision* for the College based on a clear *mission* and shared public-interest *values*.

Mission, vision and values statements are the guiding force behind an organization and the foundation for its strategic plan. The mission statement communicates the purpose of the College. The vision statement provides insight into what the College hopes to achieve in the future, and the values statement reflects the College's core principles and ethical commitments. Together, these statements will provide strategic direction for the College, informing current and future strategies. When developed and implemented in a thoughtful and deliberate manner, these statements can serve as powerful tools that provide NSCCT with meaningful guidance, especially under times of rapid change or uncertainty.

2. Embark on a province-wide educational campaign designed to better inform registrants and the general public about the role of the College.

At the urging of the Department of Health and Wellness, the College has committed to exploring ways to ensure that all registrants are clear about the public-interest mandate of the College, and that the public learns the importance of ensuring that their therapist is a licensed registrant of a regulatory College.

3. Conduct a large-scale review of Continuing Education Requirements and process, including a national-level environmental scan to determine the most efficient method of ensuring continuing competence and knowledge acquisition.

As part of its public-interest mandate the College is required to determine standards for the continuing education requirements of all licensed registrants to ensure the delivery of safe, competent and ethical counselling therapy services to Nova

Scotians. A variety of effective competency maintenance plans exist across the span of health regulators that might provide insight into how the College could make the CEC process more effective and efficient.

Committee Reports

Statutory Committees

The *Counselling Therapists Act* requires that the College establish and populate five (5) committees to carry out specific legislative functions. Terms of Reference for each Statutory committee can be found at www.nscct.ca

Registration Committee
Registration Appeals Committee
Complaints Committee
Professional Conduct Committee
Reinstatement Committee

Registration Committee Report

One of the core responsibilities of the College is to safeguard the public by registering and licensing only those who meet the criteria set out in the *Act*.

The Registration Committee oversees all aspects of the registration and licensure process of the College.

Membership:

Lisa Dexter, RCT, Chair (Interim)

Dereck Smith, RCT

John Hubert, EDR (ex officio)

The College has seen steady growth in numbers since the last AGM. This appears to be due largely to the impact of more RCT-C applications from Yorkville University (NB) combined with an increase in CFTA transfers, mainly from Ontario. The number of RCTs have increase by 73 from last report to 288 and RCT-Cs by 56 to 205. In non-licensed categories Student Affiliates have gone from 6 to 13 (again mostly from Yorkville) and we have also more than doubled the number of

Associates from 7 to 15.

We are pleased to have had our registration practices reviewed and deemed compliant with the *Fair Registration Practices Act* (FRPA). This is a major accomplishment for the College.

Registration practices have been streamlined and the processes enhanced by the use of simplified on-line application forms and the introduction of a separate email for receiving applications and for submitting application fees. New on-line 'self-serve' forms are also in use for Change of Supervisor and Request for Leave. On-line Weekly Summary and Supervision Reports are also now available.

Complaints Committee Report

The Complaints Committee reviews all complaints against registrants. It works to resolve and adjudicate complaints within narrowly prescribed parameters and determines which complaints warrant referral to the Professional Conduct Committee.

Membership:

Lisa Matthews, (public representative), Chair

Sue Ward, RCT

Sara Lamb, RCT

Alison Arthur, RCT

John Hubert, EDR (ex officio)

This has been a busy year for the Committee. There are currently 12 open complaint files. Since the last report there have been 11 files closed and there have been 14 new complaints received.

The Board of Directors has set aside \$30,000 to fund a new budget line to support external investigations when determined necessary by the Committee.

Ancillary Committee Reports

Ethics and Practice Standards Committee Report

Ethics and Standards of Practice are essential elements in the protection of the public. The Ethics and Practice Standards Sub-Committee is mandated to review the ethics and practice documents which govern registrants, support the work of other committees on relevant issues, and offer advice to registrants of the College to ensure the public has access to safe, competent and ethical care.

Membership:

Alison Arthur, RCT, CCC-S, Chair

Jeff MacDonald, RCT

Mary Norton, RCT-C

Karen Johnston-Hutchins, RCT

The Ethics Committee met in March 2021 to discuss an identified conflict between the *Code of Ethics* and NSCCT policy SC 01.1 (Candidacy Supervision). Through work with the Policy Committee and the Board of Directors, the conflict was rectified in April 2021.

In addition, periodically throughout the year, the Ethics Committee has served to answer questions submitted by registrants, through the EDR, in regard to ethical matters. These have either been dealt with by the Chair, or by the entire committee, depending on the complexity of the issue or query. There have been approximately 12 such inquiries.

Moving forward, a closer association between the Ethics Committee and the Policy Committee would seem advisable as new policies are being drafted, and existing ones revised. This collaboration would serve to maintain open discussion around policy compliance with our *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice*.

Respectfully submitted,

Alison Arthur, MEd, RCT, CCC-S

Chair, Ethics and Practice Standards Committee

Policy and Procedures Committee Report

The Policy and Procedures Committee exists to review, update and develop draft policies and procedures for Board approval.

Membership:

Michelle Labine, RCT-C, CCC, Chair

Davina Melanson, RCT

Lori Slaunwhite, RCT

Jylian MacLeod, RCT-C

Stacy Darku, RCT-C

Lisa Matthews, Public Representative

John Hubert, EDR (ex officio)

The Policy Committee met on several occasions in the winter and early spring to update, create and edit documents for FRPA (Fair Registration Practices Act) review.

In April, the Policy Committee convened after receiving a letter from the Ethics Committee to review a conflict between the *Code of Ethics* and the NSCCT policy SC 01.1 (Candidacy Supervision). Alison Arthur, Chair of the Ethics Committee, attended the meeting to outline the concerns, express recommendations and answer questions. The Policy Committee then met separately to further discuss the issue and prepare a brief report and motion to the Board of Directors.

In May, the Policy Committee adopted concise guidelines and standards for policy making which will help ensure consistency, transparency and a common foundation. The committee also piloted a Skills Attributes Matrix, a questionnaire designed and intended to help achieve the appropriate mix of skills, knowledge and attributes among the members of committees as members leave and new members are appointed. The matrix will now be used in the recruitment process for all College committees.

In June, we filled a vacancy on the Policy Committee.

The Policy Committee met on several occasions in late spring, summer and in September to review older college financial policies. We completed an intensive environmental scan of financial policies from CRPO, College of Nurses and Paramedics. We developed draft cash management policies where there were gaps and updated existing policies. By the time of the AGM, the Board will have approved five new or revised finance policies:

- Budgeting Principles
- Signing Authority
- Electronic Funds Transfer
- Reimbursement of Expenses
- Investments

In addition, there is a new Leave from Active Practice policy and substantial work has been done on a Zero Tolerance for Sexual Abuse policy and a companion document on Sexual Misconduct

As we continue to progress in our work of drafting new policies and revisiting existing ones, the Policy Committee will continue to collaborate with the other college committees, in particular, the Ethics Committee to ensure compliance with our *Code of Ethics* and *Standards of Practice*.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle Labine, MA, RCT-C, CCC
Chair, Policy Committee

Report from the Treasurer

We've had some good movement forward with our finances this year!

With board approval and in coordination with the NSCCT staff, we were able to successfully begin shifting towards increased accountability, financial stability and professionalism while also upgrading the systems used on a daily basis.

- Increased accountability
 - We shifted into a locally owned, efficient, dependable and cost-effective bank CUA (Credit Union Atlantic)
 - Reduced annual banking fees.
 - The particular services we are paying for, are in a one-year contract with CUA, to ensure that we are happy with the performance. All services will be reviewed in April 2022.
 - We are now using online banking for all of the College's financial transactions.
 - Every transaction requires the approval of two of the three authorized signing authorities, the Chair, Treasurer or EDR.
 - Increased ability to track incoming registration/renewal payments
 - With the help of our new accounting firm we have reorganized budget line-items to more accurately reflect actual cash flow
- Increased financial stability
 - Paid unrecognized outstanding invoices from previous years
 - Shifted the GIC (Guaranteed Investment Certificate) maturity schedule from every two years to quarterly rollovers to allow the College to continue earning interest on our capital while increasing access to emergency funds.
 - Created a budget line of \$30,000 to support Complaints and Professional Conduct activities.

- Began the process of changing the fiscal year to line up with the end of the registration renewal period and annual cashflow. The new fiscal year will run April 1 to March 31.
- Increased professionalism
 - Replaced our bookkeeping service with a professional accounting firm, (Jessome and Associates CPA) to help increase accountability and financial advising
 - We have a one-year trial contract to ensure that we are happy with their services. It will be reviewed at fiscal year-end
 - Contracted a new auditing firm (Lyle-Tilley-Davidson CPA) with not-for-profit experience,
 - Again, this is a one-year contract with them, to ensure that we are happy with their services. It will need to be reviewed at fiscal year-end.
 - Increased efficiency by connecting the NSCCT's new accounting firm to our CRA (Canadian Revenue Agency) account.

As we look forward to next year, we are excited to begin working with modernized financial policies developed in coordination with the Policy Committee to help guide the Board's financial movements. I will be working closely over the next month to orient the new Treasurer to College financial processes.

Below is the Approved Budget for fiscal 2021-2022 follows this report.

Respectfully,



Nathan M. Torti, RCT

Treasurer

Approved 2021-2022 Operating Budget

Funds available beginning fiscal year

126,282.91

<i>Account Name</i>	<i>Amount</i>
REVENUE	
Registrant Revenue	
Registrations/Renewals	280,000.00
Registration Application Fees	7,500.00
Category Transfer Fees	2,000.00
Affiliate Fees/Renewals	750.00
Renewal Late Fee	1,100.00
	-
Total Registrant Revenue	291,350.00
Other Revenue	
Other Income	1,500.00
Administrative Processing Fees	500.00
Total Other Income	2,000.00
TOTAL REVENUE	293,350.00
EXPENSES	
Payroll Expenses	
Wages - EDR	48,100.00
Wages - AC	38,000.00
	-
EI Expense	1,904.00
CPP Expense	4,311.00
Total Payroll Expense	92,315.00
Contract Services	
Auditor	5,000.00
Web Host	600.00
Guild	8,800.00
Accountant	6,000.00
Total Contract Services Expense	20,400.00
General & Admin Expenses	
Legal Fees	5,000.00
Amortization Expense	500.00
Board Insurance	1,720.00
Bank Charges (Incl. Payroll Deposit)	840.00
Credit Card Fees	5,500.00
Office Supplies	1,500.00
Office Equipment	1,000.00
Software	2,100.00
Stakeholder Engagement	1,000.00
Dues, Fees and Registrations	1,850.00
Professional Development	15,000.00
Rent	14,490.00
Professional Conduct	30,000.00
Telephone	1,200.00
Travel Expenses - Board/Committees	2,000.00
AGM Expense	1,500.00
Total General & Admin Expenses	85,200.00

TOTAL EXPENSE	<u>197,915.00</u>
NET INCOME	<u>95,435.00</u>
Projected balance end of fiscal year	<u>221,717.91</u>