



## Letter of Guidance on COVID-19 Operational Plan Development for Private Practitioners

We recognize that the last few months have been stressful, confusing, and sometimes anxiety-inducing and that as the province begins its phased reopening of businesses and services there are still many questions.

During this time, we will continue to provide members with as much information as possible and we continue to support all recommendations made by the Chief Medical Officer and the Department of Health. To ensure you remain informed on the latest information regarding the virus, we recommend reviewing the [Government of New Brunswick's Coronavirus webpage](#) frequently. Additionally, for more specific information on reopening in compliance with the Government of New Brunswick's regulations, please [click here for their Guidance Document of General Public Health Measures During COVID-19 Recovery](#) or [here for WorkSafeNB's Embracing the New Normal as we Safely Return to Work](#). The provincial government has also prepared an additional document to provide guidance for primary care providers working in a community setting, which you can access [here](#).

Over the next weeks and months, it is especially important that we all continue to remain vigilant and take care of ourselves. If you have any questions that have not been addressed here, we encourage you to [contact us](#).

### Operational Plan for Social Workers in Private Practice

Prior to reopening, all businesses, including social workers working in private practice, are **required** to have a written Operational Plan, documenting their risk assessment and mitigation measures consistent with Public Health guidance and WorkSafeNB rules and regulations. If you are a member of the NBASW working for an employer, such as a Health Network or the Department of Social Development, the operational plan is already developed by your employer. If you are the owner of your private practice, however, you will be required to develop this plan for yourself, your staff, and your clients.

Individual COVID-19 Operational Plans will not be reviewed or approved by Public Health, WorkSafeNB or the NBASW prior to a business reopening its doors, however Public Health and WorkSafeNB can conduct spot checks of any business that has chosen to reopen. When asked to produce the Operational Plan by these organizations, business owners are required to produce this written document; failure to comply can result in recommended improvements to increase mitigation measures within the Operational Plan and/or potential fines by Public Health or WorkSafeNB.

The goal of this Letter of Guidance is to ensure that a framework to help mitigate the risks in the return to work setting is in place, and that you have considered and included the following in your Operational Plan.



### **Procedures for Setting up Appointments (i.e., deciding how to see clients)**

- Determine with your clients if they would prefer to continue virtual appointments or if they would prefer to return to in-person appointments. If continuing virtual appointments, you can consult our [Letter of Guidance Regarding Technology and Social Work Practice](#) for more information on how to engage in social work practice through virtual means.
- Continue to see clients virtually whenever feasible, including most psychotherapy work with adults and adolescents.

### **Procedures Before In-Person Sessions**

- Prior to scheduling or confirming appointments, screen clients over the phone for any relevant symptoms or travel history. [Click here for a sample pre-screening tool.](#)
- If a client is displaying symptoms, has been in contact with a person displaying symptoms, or has been outside of the province in the last 14 days, inform them that their face-to-face appointments need to be cancelled. Refusing to see such clients, with appropriate explanation, would not in itself be a breach of standards of care.
- Schedule appointments in such a way that allows sufficient time for cleaning between appointments and minimize the number of clients in the waiting room at any given time.
- Relax appointment rescheduling and cancellation policies until such time as the risk is substantially lowered (e.g. by waiving cancellation fees).
- If your office is in a building controlled by someone other than yourself, inform your clients that you are only responsible for your office's procedures, and not those of the building. However, you should remain aware of your building's COVID-19 rules and regulations (e.g. cleaning protocols, entrances and exits, etc.).
- Ensure that your clients understand and consent to your Operational Plan before attending a face-to-face session.

### **Procedures During In-Person Sessions**

- Ensure workplace procedures are in place to respect physical distancing upon client arrival and in between in-person sessions (e.g. have clients wait in their cars until it is time for their session, have clients text or call upon arrival, etc.).
- Upon clients' arrival for appointments, review with them the checklist for symptoms and travel history and have the client sign the checklist. Cancel appointments where necessary. Ensure this documentation is placed in the client's file.
- The NBASW recommends adapting your patient consent form so that it allows you to share the client's contact information with Public Health if you were to contract COVID-19 and contact tracing is necessary. Include this signed consent in the client's file.
- Ensure that physical distancing between yourself and client or clients is maintained during in-person sessions unless this is not possible or feasible.
- When possible, use personal protective equipment as recommended in the Government of



New Brunswick's [Guidance Document of General Public Health Measures During COVID-19 Recovery](#).

- Encourage clients and others to wash their hands or to utilize a hand sanitizing station when entering the office and/or seating area.

### **Procedures for Workplaces**

- Ensure that physical distancing requirements are not violated by interactions between clients and staff employed by or supervised by yourself.
- Schedule clients to ensure that physical distancing requirements are not violated by client to client interaction (e.g. allow time in between appointments so that one client can leave the building before the next client enters).
- When seeing clients in shared spaces, develop collaborative plans with other users of the space to enable physical distancing (e.g. place chairs 6 feet/2 meters apart from one another).
- Minimize required wait time in a waiting room and remove all non-necessary items (e.g., toys, books).
- Ensure high-touch surfaces such as doorknobs, light switches, phones, and sink faucets are cleaned with a disinfectant between client appointments. For more examples of high-touch surfaces, review the Government of New Brunswick's [Guidance Document of General Public Health Measures During COVID-19 Recovery](#).

### **Procedures for Personal and Public Health**

- Follow guidance of the Chief Public Health Officer on all matters, including hand washing, coughing into the elbow, and physical distancing. You can find more information on these public health advisories, and printable signs to be hung in your office [here](#).
- If you suspect that a client may have COVID-19, you should discuss with the client the importance of self-disclosure and/or encourage them to get tested and should explain [the process of testing](#) to them.
- If you become ill with COVID-19, believe you have been exposed to it and should self-isolate, or have been outside the province in the last 14 days, immediate withdrawal from in-person practice is required. In such cases, you should properly notify your clients and provide them with information about alternative services that might be available so that they can continue care where necessary.
- Members experiencing symptoms will cease face-to-face practice, self-isolate and inform Public Health by [completing the online self-assessment tool and following the instructions](#). Due to confidentiality requirements in the [Code of Ethics](#), you should not provide client information to Public Health unless you have received consent from the client. As such, the NBASW recommends adapting your patient consent form so that it allows you to share the client's contact information with Public Health if you were to contract COVID-19 and contact tracing is necessary. Include this signed consent in the client's file.

*The NBASW wants to acknowledge the College of Psychologists of New Brunswick for allowing us to use their in-person guideline as a framework.*

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