

The Importance of Regulation in Social Work & Beyond:

*A Request for Member Feedback on
Regulating Social Work Technicians*



A Social Work
Recruitment & Retention
Strategy Initiative

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The New Brunswick Association of Social Workers (NBASW) is exploring the possibility of regulating a social work paraprofession, something that would be new to the province of New Brunswick. Before moving forward, the Association needs to hear from the social workers of New Brunswick, to see whether this is an initiative social workers value their Association undertaking and to better understand the ways in which a paraprofession could support social workers, across their various roles. **Please stay tuned to the end of the document for a list of consultation questions on the topic, found on page 14.**

We hope to hear from you and wish to thank you for all the important work that you do, as social workers in New Brunswick!

2.0 IMPORTANCE OF REGULATION

Being a professional social worker, licensed to practice in the province of New Brunswick, is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is a privilege that social workers can self-regulate and set the expectations for the social work profession that, when passed by NBASW members and the New Brunswick legislature, become law. This law now ensures that individuals who meet the criteria outlined in the Act, the [New Brunswick Association of Social Workers Act](#) (2019), can identify themselves as social workers and practice within the scope of social work in New Brunswick.

As regulated health professionals, social workers must maintain their licensure and comply with the registration requirements set in place by the NBASW. To maintain licensure, social workers engage in yearly continuing education requirements and ensure that their social work practice aligns with the practice standards, guidelines, and Code of Ethics that are maintained by the Association.

It is very straightforward; the study of courses in social work does not make someone a social worker. It is only by registering with a governing body that oversees the profession that a license is activated and that a person becomes a Registered Social Worker (RSW), eligible to practice in the applicable jurisdiction.

Regulation is important as it ensures that social work is only practiced by individuals who are approved to do so. It also ensures that those individuals meet a standard of competence that protects the public when services from a social worker are being delivered. The public is protected through the maintenance of high practice standards, ongoing registration requirements (including professional education requirements), and an accountability mechanism, all of which are provided through the NBASW as the regulatory body in New Brunswick.

3.0 SOCIAL WORK RECRUITMENT & RETENTION STRATEGY

Over the past few decades, the need for social workers has expanded and it has been projected that by 2030 there will be a shortage of 272 social workers in New Brunswick, resulting in a tangible gap in services. Social work has been identified as the second-highest profession in need of a recruitment and retention strategy in the province. With population needs rising since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increased demand for social work services across sectors, and it is likely that the future gap for social workers will be even greater than was originally forecasted. If significant steps aren't taken, **there won't be enough social workers to fill social work positions and meet people's needs** in the coming years. Some would suggest that New Brunswick is already seeing this workforce shortage, recognizing the social work vacancies that currently exist across the province.

The NBASW is currently leading a Social Work Recruitment and Retention Strategy Steering Committee, which includes representatives from various government departments, health authorities, schools of social work, colleges, unions, and more, in developing a 5-year Social Work Recruitment and Retention Strategy Action Plan. This is being done to ensure that there are enough social workers in the province to meet the needs of New Brunswickers, both now and for years to come. To make a strategy that is as effective as possible, it is important that the voices of NBASW members be used to inform the Strategy and its' actions. As the social workers we strive to retain in New Brunswick, we are once again looking for your input to inform Strategy initiatives.

3.1 Recruitment & Retention Member Survey

To better understand what social workers view as priorities in terms of recruitment and retention, the NBASW surveyed all 2,178 of its members in April 2022. The subject resonated with social workers and they were eager to share their thoughts and experiences, resulting in over 800 members responding to the survey within a three-week period. With a 37% response rate and a high degree of confidence, the survey data provides a clear picture of what social workers need to be recruited and retained, both to the province and to the profession. For those interested in reading the complete report, the [Results from the Social Work Recruitment and Retention Strategy Member Survey](#) can be found on the NBASW website.

3.1.1 Survey Results: What We Heard

The survey results show that social workers are experiencing overwhelming stress levels, with over half of all social worker respondents indicating that they are experiencing extreme exhaustion and excessive prolonged stress. Results show that social workers are being overworked and aren't receiving the support they need from their employers in order to stay in

their jobs, long-term. Social workers, province-wide, are experiencing high caseloads and are being overwhelmed with administrative requirements when they want to focus on performing social work-specific skills and interventions in their roles. Social workers are facing barriers in performing the roles they are specially trained to do and something needs to change. What can be done, right now, to help?

4.0 INTRODUCING A SOCIAL WORK PARAPROFESSION

The introduction of a paraprotection to support the social work profession is long overdue. Paraprofessionals formally trained as Social Work Technicians are viewed as one of the solutions to alleviate some of the pressures currently placed on social workers. In their role, Social Work Technicians would take on some of the transferrable (non-social work-specific) tasks currently assigned to social workers and would work with clients to provide services often contracted to unregulated third-party individuals, allowing social workers to focus on their responsibilities as professionals.

To accomplish this, the [New Brunswick Association of Social Workers Act](#) (2019) must be amended to include the Social Work Technician paraprotection. While the legislative definition is still in the works, at this time, the “practice of social work technician” is being defined as “the paraprotectional support to the practice of social work”.

4.1 Paraprofessional Role

The focus for Social Work Technicians would be to provide support to the social work profession and be specifically trained to do so. Technicians would work alongside social workers and help implement social work intervention plans, by performing activities within the Social Work Technician scope of practice.

While the official Social Work Technician scope of practice would be developed with NBASW members later on, once the NBASW has been granted regulatory powers, Technicians would provide foundational helping skills such as supervised visitations, accompanying clients to meetings/appointments, helping clients acquire skills, assessing basic client needs, and more, with the goal of assisting clients in achieving optimal social functioning. Social Work Technicians would implement aspects of social work case plans and it is expected that Technicians would also engage in professional documentation, crisis intervention, and advocacy within their roles.

In many areas of practice, social workers enter peoples’ homes to perform the duties of their roles. At times, there may be significant unknowns or concerns for the safety of social workers and, while police presence can be requested, it is recognized police presence may not be the best

option for every situation. There have been instances where social workers requested that a fellow social worker accompany them to a client visit, only to have their request denied, due to a lack of available staff at the time, resulting in situations that could have had devastating outcomes. Regulating Social Work Technicians would provide a new classification of individuals working in systems who would be able to accompany social workers to client visits. Having Social Work Technicians to accompany social workers would serve as a protective measure and would provide a credible eyewitness for court as needed, while also allowing Technicians to get to know the clients they'd be working with in their roles.

The concept of Social Work Technicians is not to replace social workers, but rather to give more readily available partners to carry out some of the paraprofessional work that social workers are often forced to do, allowing social workers to spend more time on social work-specific tasks and interventions within their roles.

The NBASW envisions regulating Social Work Technicians who will be employed to implement portions of social work case plans. Having Social Work Technicians working alongside social workers, across organizations, would allow Technicians to work closely with the clients' social workers serve, building rapport with clients and allowing for more effective paraprofessional service delivery.

It is important that clients have access to trained, competent, and regulated paraprofessionals who know how to respond effectively to individuals and families experiencing trauma and crisis. Introducing a new paraprofessional classification would serve to elevate the social work profession while, most importantly, protecting the vulnerable clients' social workers serve.

4.2 Paraprofessional Education

Other Canadian jurisdictions already have this regulated paraprofession working in communities and alongside social workers. In Ontario, both the social work paraprofession and social workers are regulated by the *Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW)*. OCSWSSW highlights differences between social workers and social service workers being in the regulated titles, the scope of practice (actions, intensity, and breadth of practice), the day-to-day functions, and the entry-to-practice (educational) requirements.

The New Brunswick Community College (NBCC) adapted the educational curriculum from Humber College in Ontario, in the development of the two-year NBCC *Social Service Community Worker (SSCW)* program, which will be graduating its first cohort in June 2023. The *Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB)* is also working on developing a French SSCW program to offer in its' colleges.

Social Work Technicians will have completed their post-secondary education from an approved college program, such as the two-year NBCC SSCW program. While program approval standards would be developed later in the work of operationalizing Social Work Technicians, approved programs will provide students with experiential and learning opportunities to fully integrate theory and practice. Social Work Technician education touches on foundational social work and social service theory, research, case management, professional practice, ethics, and other courses that provide graduates with skills complementary to those of social workers and that prepare them to work alongside social workers in their roles.

Specifically, SSCW students are provided with practical, integrated learning experiences and a body of knowledge related to the promotion of human well-being, with a focus on strengths-based practice and rational choice theory. SSCW curriculum also includes two counselling courses that introduce students to the fundamentals of counselling¹. Counselling courses at a college (Technician) level introduce and provide a preliminary understanding of counselling theories and processes to prepare graduates for Technician-level practice. These courses are not as in-depth as the counselling skills, knowledge, and training that social workers receive in university and utilize in social work practice.

It is important that approved college programs include a counselling component, as having a foundational understanding of counselling will help SSCW graduates in their various areas of practice, where they may use basic counselling skills in their roles, such as foundational crisis intervention skills or helping clients to identify and make use of their strengths/assets. These courses provide graduates with useful knowledge and skills that can be drawn upon in practice, as Social Work Technicians.

4.2.1 Opportunity for an Educational Pathway

The college education obtained by Social Work Technicians provides a strong foundation for the pursuit of a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) education. Developing a college-to-BSW educational pathway that: 1. Recognizes the value of Social Work Technician education; and 2. Provides a seamless process through which approved college graduates can upgrade to a BSW will help recruit new social workers to the profession.

A college-to-university pathway would increase the feasibility for individuals to obtain a Bachelor-level education, by reducing university-level requirements and providing college graduates with the option to work as a paraprofessional before or while pursuing a BSW degree. Structuring the educational pathway to recognize the completion of an approved two-year college program, such as NBCC's SSCW program, as equivalent to the first two years of a four-

¹ Information regarding NBCC SSCW program found online here : <https://nbcc.ca/programs-courses/program-details?baseCurriculumId=e670366b-c866-49db-86bc-75efdfa11ecb>



year BSW degree, would allow college graduates to obtain their BSW's in two years, making the social work profession a more realistic and attainable goal to those interested in the profession. The development of an educational pathway is expected to help increase the number of new social workers in the province after they've completed their BSW's.

Additionally, for those who hold a diploma from a human service program that has not been approved for Social Work Technician registration, a college-level educational up-grading program could be developed. Successful completion of this micro-credentialing program, in addition to an existing diploma in the field of human services, would provide individuals with a level of education equivalent to that of Social Work Technicians. Having this process in place would provide a pathway for qualified individuals to become registered Social Work Technicians, further enhancing the pathway to the social work paraprofession and profession.

5.0 REGULATING A PARAPROFESSION

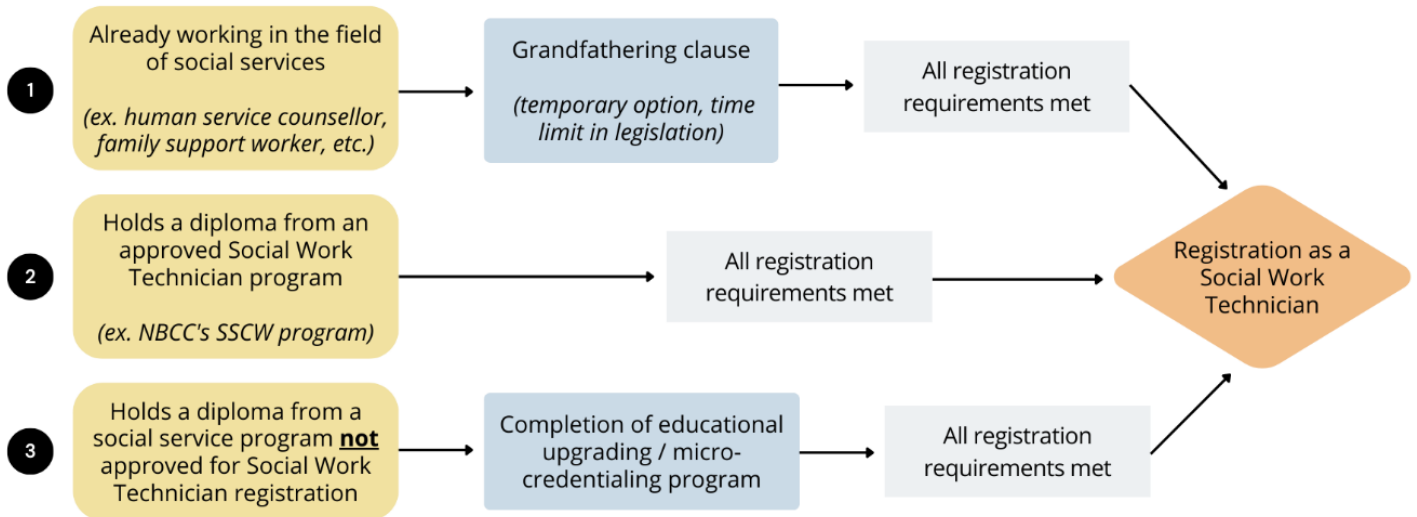
Regulating the Social Work Technician paraprofession would ensure that clients receive high-quality, competent services, through the establishment of licensure requirements and the provision of an accountability mechanism. This mechanism would include having a complaint and discipline process in place through the NBASW, as the regulatory body.

In New Brunswick, organizations and departments are increasingly hiring and contracting unregulated individuals (family support workers, human service counsellors, etc.) and incorporating them into workplace structures. These individuals are providing services that could otherwise fall into the Social Work Technician scope of practice.

Those who were around in 1988, when the NBASW obtained control of the title and practice of social work, may remember that the government imposed a grandfathering and equivalency clause for those who were already working as social workers, before social work became a regulated health profession. When it comes to regulating new professions and paraprofessions, it is common for grandfathering and equivalency clauses to be included in legislation for a specific period of time. It is expected that the same will likely happen again; providing a transitional framework for individuals already working in the field to become Social Work Technicians.

The NBASW continues to receive calls from members of the public with concerns regarding their experiences with unregulated individuals. Currently, the NBASW only has the mandate to regulate the profession of social work. Regulating Social Work Technicians would meet the needs of the public, by ensuring that only competent individuals practice the paraprofession, and would allow the NBASW to address complaints regarding Social Work Technicians.

Potential Pathways to Becoming a Social Work Technician



The value of having regulated paraprofessionals working with clients, alongside social workers, is already being recognized by organizations (including government/major social work employers and unions) and is being considered an important step in ensuring the public receives high-quality services, in addition to increasing the number of social workers in the province, long-term.

If regulated, Social Work Technicians would be required to engage in continuing education, adhere to their Code of Ethics and standards of practice, and practice within their specific scope of practice. Having the NBASW regulate both the social work profession and Social Work Technician paraprofession would ensure that the two scopes of practice remain defined and distinct and would allow for the NBASW to educate the public on the Social Work Technician paraprofession, while also furthering public awareness of the social work profession and the important roles that social workers do.

If the NBASW were to regulate Social Work Technicians, it would:

- ✓ Establish clear parameters around paraprofessional title and role.
- ✓ Enact licensing/entry to practice requirements.
- ✓ Establish a governance structure that meets the needs of social workers.
- ✓ Provide control over the scope of practice (prevent scope creep).
- ✓ Allow the NBASW to have input in college curriculums and approve college programs.
- ✓ Protect the public by establishing an accountability mechanism.

- ✓ Provide an opportunity to promote both the social work profession and Social Work Technician paraprofession.
- ✓ Allow organizations to incorporate regulated paraprofessionals into systems, to support social workers and meet the needs of the public.
- ✓ Provide college graduates from related social service programs (programs not approved for Social Work Technician registration) with a micro-credentialing program, giving them the option to upgrade their education to become Social Work Technicians.
- ✓ Provide an educational pathway to the social work profession, increasing the number of social workers long-term!

5.1 Process of Becoming the Regulator

NBASW members are responsible for determining the strategic direction of their Association and first need to want the NBASW to regulate a social work paraprofession. Members in each of the provincial Chapters vote for a representative to sit as their Chapter Director on the NBASW Board of Directors, with the responsibility of representing their Chapter in matters of the Board. At the September 2022 Board of Directors meeting, the concept of regulating social work paraprofessionals was discussed and the Board unanimously agreed with the concept, allowing the NBASW to begin engaging in member consultations.

While the exact legislative definition is still in the works, at this time, the “practice of social work technician” is being defined as “the paraprofessional support to the practice of social work”.

These consultations are just beginning, and we want members to be involved as much as possible, every step of the way, before members ultimately decide whether they want their Association to regulate a social work paraprofession.

For the NBASW to regulate a social work paraprofession, the NBASW Act must first provide the organization with this power, which would require legislative amendments. To amend the Act, NBASW members first need to approve the legislative amendments by majority vote at a Special or Annual General Meeting, after which time it would be up to the legislature to pass the amendments, making them law.

There are just a few legislative changes that would be required for the NBASW to regulate a paraprofession, which include:

1. defining the paraprofessional practice (example provided above);
2. approving college programs;
3. determining equivalency of qualification; and
4. establishing a governance structure.

Only once the NBASW has been granted the power to regulate social work paraprofessionals will other regulatory documents, such as amended by-laws and a scope of practice, be developed alongside members, before also being brought for member decision.

6.0 LOOKING BACK & MOVING FORWARD

This isn't the first time that the Association has explored the possibility of regulating a social work paraprofession. The possibility was first brought to the Association in the early 2000s and was most recently considered during the development of the 2019 Act. Regulating a social work paraprofession wasn't considered a top priority for the Association at the time of these past discussions. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has since resulted in tremendous amounts of global stress which has increased the demand for social work services and exacerbated the stress and overwhelm felt by social workers.

6.1 Paraprofessional Title: Why Call Them Social Work Technicians?

The title of the paraprofession is not set in stone, as it is not yet enshrined in legislation. However, the title *Social Work Technicians* resonated with NBASW members in the past, so this is the term the NBASW has been using to discuss the concept this time around.

During the member consultations for the 2019 Act, the term *Social Work Technician* was the title members preferred. The term "technician" refers to people whose job involves skilled practical work. This term aligns with the titles given to other allied health paraprofessional roles in New Brunswick, such as Pharmacy Technicians, Dental Technicians, Emergency Medical Technicians, and so on. The term would clearly link the paraprofession and profession together, recognizing Social Work Technicians as falling under the umbrella of social work and serving to elevate the social work profession. The term *Social Work Technician* also helps to establish and clarify the professional hierarchy, recognizing that technicians are trained to provide a specific set of skills, while professionals have a greater scope of practice and are responsible for making complex decisions drawing on a broad base of knowledge, skills, and experience.

Recognizing New Brunswick's two official languages, French and English, the *Social Work Technician* title in English best reflects the French version of the title. To demonstrate this point, here are some title examples, in both official languages:

1. Social Work Technician / Technicien en travail social
2. Social Service Worker / Technicien en travail social
3. Social Service Technician / Technicien en travail social

As can be seen in this example, titles that may differ in English, may in fact be the same in French. The title *Social Work Technician / Technicien en travail social* aligns with the technician categories regulated by other provincial allied health professions, reflects the title used in both of New Brunswick's official languages, and establishes the paraprofession as being part of the social work family, while more clearly distinguishing paraprofessionals from other unregulated support worker positions.

The data from the recent member survey confirms that social workers need support now. Regulating Social Work Technicians is a way to support social workers in their roles while providing an educational pathway to increase the number of social workers in the province and protecting the clients that social workers work with every day.

The many years the Association has been discussing the possibility of one day regulating a social work paraprofession has established a foundation that has helped to push the initiative along, present-day. This long history, combined with the recent addition of the NBCC SSCW program, the need for public protection, the difficulties currently being faced by social workers, and the urgent need to increase the number of social workers in New Brunswick make the regulation of a social work paraprofession a priority initiative for the NBASW at this time. But what still needs to be done to make regulating Social Work Technicians a reality?

6.2 Next Steps

6.2.1 *Amending the NBASW's Legislation*

To regulate a social work paraprofession, the NBASW will need to make amendments to our legislation that includes the addition of Social Work Technicians. This work is currently underway and the NBASW looks forward to involving members in the development and implementation of a new Act, as well as in the development of future regulatory documents (by-laws, scope of practice, etc.).

6.2.2 *Determining a Governance Structure*

To regulate a paraprofession, the NBASW will need to develop a new governance structure that includes both social workers and Social Work Technicians. A process will be developed to ensure that both levels are adequately represented on the Board, recognizing that the NBASW Act gives the Board the authority to establish social work practice standards. As such, the new governance structure must ensure that the profession of social work is not eroded in governance and that social workers still have a majority say in decisions of the Board, including important decisions regarding social work practice. A governance framework will be brought to members as part of the proposed legislative amendments.



6.2.3 Graduating Potential Social Work Technicians

The first cohort of students from NBCC's SSCW program is set to graduate in June 2023. This will be the first cohort of students eligible for registration as Social Work Technicians. The NBASW hopes to regulate the paraprofession at the time of their graduation, so those that wish to can become registered Social Work Technicians.

6.2.4 Developing a French College Program

CCNB is working on developing a French SSCW program to offer in its colleges. Graduating a cohort of French SSCWs who are eligible to become registered Social Work Technicians is vital to meet the needs of New Brunswickers, francophone especially.

6.2.5 Introducing a New Educational Pathway

Developing a streamlined college-to-BSW pathway will be important in increasing the number of social workers in the province, by making entry to the profession more realistic and attainable to approved college graduates. Discussions are currently underway on how to make this pathway a reality.

6.2.6 Finalizing a 5-Year Social Work Recruitment & Retention Strategy for Implementation

The work to regulate Social Work Technicians is just one of the many actions that will be done to recruit and retain social workers in New Brunswick. The NBASW will continue to lead the development of a robust 5-year Recruitment and Retention Strategy, which will be finalized by March 2023. The Strategy aims to be comprehensive and address many of the challenges faced by New Brunswick social workers. Other potential actions currently being considered, to help with the recruitment and retention of social workers, include advocating for higher levels of compensation, addressing caseloads, developing a comprehensive wellness strategy, establishing a mentorship program, and more.



7.0 MEMBER CONSULTATION: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As we begin discussing the concept of social work paraprofessionals, we want to know:

1. How do you see Social Work Technicians helping social workers in their various roles?
2. How do you see the Social Work Technician Role assisting clients and their families?
3. How could a Social Work Technician help you to alleviate your workload?
4. Do you have any other thoughts you'd like to share with the NBASW, regarding the concept of regulating a paraprofession (Social Work Technicians)?

Please send your responses to the NBASW Social Work Consultant, Keara Grey at keara.grey@nbasw-attsnb.ca by January 29, 2022.

We hope to hear from you, the social workers of New Brunswick, and look forward to continuing these discussions in the coming weeks and months. Thank you for your consideration, time, and input!