



Pathways to Excellence:

A Competency-Based Professional Development Framework & Learning Plan Guide

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Contact

Provincial Practice Supports

Recovery Alberta: Mental Health and Addiction Services

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<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page16083.aspx>

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Introduction

The Recovery Alberta: Mental Health and Addiction Services (Recovery Alberta) Competency-Based Professional Development Framework and Learning Plan Guide is a foundational tool designed to support the growth of all staff working in mental health and addiction services—whether your role is focused on mental health, substance use and addiction or a combination of both.

Rooted in the principles of person-centered, safe, evidence-informed, concurrent capable, and recovery-oriented care, this guide helps staff to identify strengths, set meaningful goals, and create learning plans that align with Recovery Alberta's values and national standards.

The competencies outlined in this guide are inclusive and applicable across settings and disciplines, supporting both regulated and non-regulated health professionals. They reflect shared expectations for ethical, effective, and integrated care, aligning with the standards of practice, codes of ethics, and continuing competence requirements established by Alberta's health profession regulatory colleges under the Health Professions Act. By complementing existing professional frameworks, these competencies reinforce expectations around education, ethical practice, and lifelong learning.

Purpose

This guide outlines a competency-based professional development framework and learning plan designed to help Recovery Alberta staff maintain, enhance, and advance their professional competencies. Grounded in structured, evidence-informed, and person-centred approaches, it supports both regulated and non-regulated professionals in delivering high-quality, collaborative, culturally and gender-safe, trauma- and violence-informed, and recovery-oriented care.

Organizational learning plans are used in different ways across teams and settings and may support a range of professional development and performance activities. This framework complements existing organizational learning and performance development processes by emphasizing technical skill-building, professional identity formation, and interprofessional excellence aligned with national competency frameworks. It is intended to support—not replace—existing development approaches.

Professional Development Framework

Overview

Recovery Alberta's Competency-Based Professional Development Framework (the framework) is designed to cultivate a skilled, compassionate, and collaborative workforce across the mental health and addiction continuum.

Competency Frameworks Supporting Professional Development

The framework is grounded in two nationally recognized competency development models:

- The [CanMEDS Framework](#), developed by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC)
- The Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction's (CCSA) [Competencies for Canada's Substance Use Workforce](#) framework.

These models are complimentary and interrelated, reflecting Recovery Alberta's commitment to person-centered care, interprofessional collaboration, gender and cultural safety, and advocacy. Together, they provide a structured foundation for competency development across diverse roles and disciplines.

CCSA Competency Framework

CCSA's Workforce Competency Framework offers an evidence-informed and concurrent capable approach to ensuring services are delivered consistently across diverse backgrounds and settings in the mental health and substance use health field.

The CCSA framework includes:

- [19 Technical Competencies](#) - representing the “*what*” of a role: the knowledge and skills applied in practice
- [17 Behavioural Competencies](#) - representing the “*how*” of a role: the values, attitudes, and interpersonal skills that shape how work is performed

Each competency is assessed across four proficiency levels:

1. Foundational
2. Developing
3. Proficient
4. Advanced

These competencies are designed to complement one another and are often used in tandem to support integrated, trauma and violence-informed, and recovery-oriented care. For example, the technical competency of *Community Development* may be paired with the behavioural competency of *Collaboration and Networking* to support effective community engagement.

The CCSA competencies also inform program planning, tool development, and learning strategies that support both managers and staff across Recovery Alberta. While most staff will engage with many of the 34 competencies, proficiency levels and relevance will vary depending on role, experience, and program context. For instance, *Medications* may be essential for clinical staff but not applicable to administrative or operational support roles.

CCSA Competency Domains

Technical Competencies	Behavioural Competencies
Understanding Co-occurring Substance Use and Mental Health Concerns	Adaptability and Flexibility
Understanding Mental Health	Analytical Thinking and Decision Making
Understanding Substance Use	Collaboration and Network Building
Accountability	Continuous Learning
Collaborative Care Planning	Creativity and Innovation
Community Development	Culturally Competent and Equity-Informed Approach
Counselling	Developing Others
Families, Caregivers and Social Supports	Effective Communication
Group Facilitation	Ethical Conduct and Professionalism
Medications	Interpersonal Rapport
Outreach	Leadership
Prevention and Health Promotion	Person-Centred Care
Program Development, Implementation & Evaluation	Planning and Organizing
Record Keeping and Documentation	Self Care
Referral	Self-Management
Risk Assessment and Crisis Intervention	Self-Motivation
Screening and Assessment	Teamwork and Cooperation
Trauma and Violence-Informed Care	
Treatment Planning	

CanMEDS Framework

The CanMEDS Framework is a nationally recognized model originally designed to define the competencies required for high-quality physician care. Over time, it has been widely adopted across other health professions—including nursing, pharmacy, and rehabilitation—and has influenced competency frameworks globally.

CanMEDS emphasizes a holistic approach to professional development, moving beyond technical expertise to include the interpersonal, ethical, and collaborative skills needed to meet the evolving needs of patients and communities (Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, 2015).

Recovery Alberta references the CanMEDS Framework to support a comprehensive and interprofessional approach to competency development. This ensures alignment with RCPSC-accredited training standards and reinforces values such as person-centred, collaboration, and professional integrity.

The CanMEDS framework outlines seven key professional roles:

1. **Medical Expert:** Apply medical knowledge and clinical skills to deliver high-quality patient care.
2. **Communicator:** Communicate clearly, compassionately, and respectfully to support shared decision-making.
3. **Collaborator:** Work effectively within interprofessional teams to ensure coordinated, safe care.
4. **Leader:** Drive positive change and manage resources to improve healthcare systems.
5. **Health Advocate:** Address health inequities and support patients and communities in achieving better health.
6. **Scholar:** Commit to lifelong learning, teaching, and applying evidence-based practices.
7. **Professional:** Uphold ethical standards, integrity, and accountability in all professional actions.

These roles align closely with Recovery Alberta’s expectations for excellence in service delivery and complement the CCSA competencies to support integrated, person-centre care across disciplines.

Bringing the Frameworks Together

By integrating and referencing these two frameworks, Recovery Alberta offers a structured yet flexible approach to professional development. These models can be used in tandem or independently to support:

- Self-assessment.
- Goal setting.
- Personalized learning and development.

Whether staff are entering the field or advancing into leadership, this guide offers a clear pathway for reflection, growth, and excellence. Through active engagement with this guide, staff enhance their capabilities and contribute to a more responsive and effective system of care for individuals, families, and communities across Alberta.

Competency-to-Role Mapping

Each CCSA competency can be mapped to one or more CanMEDS roles to help staff understand how their technical and behavioural skills connect to broader professional expectations.

When mapped together, the frameworks ensure that competency development is aligned with professional identity and role clarity.

When used separately, each framework offers distinct value—CCSA for task-specific skill development, CanMeds for cultivating professional identity and interprofessional excellence.

Examples of Integration (*not an exhaustive list*):

- **Screening & Assessment** → *Medical Expert, Communicator*
- **Collaboration & Networking** → *Collaborator, Leader*

- **Advocacy** → *Health Advocate, Professional*
- **Continuous Learning** → *Scholar*

Competency-Based Learning Plans

What is a Learning Plan?

A Competency-Based Learning Plan is a personalized, structured tool that helps staff identify their current strengths, assess areas for growth, and set meaningful goals aligned with their role, responsibilities, and career aspirations. It is both a development roadmap and a reflection tool, supporting continuous learning and professional excellence.

Why Complete a Competency-Based Learning Plan?

The Recovery Alberta Competency-Based Learning Plan is a foundation of professional development. It supports high-quality, person-centered care and aligns with national standards.

Here's why it matters:

- 1. Improves Care Outcomes**
Develops skills in trauma and violence-informed, gender and culturally safe, and recovery-oriented care.
- 2. Supports Professional Growth**
Empowers staff to take ownership of their development through self-assessment, SMART goal setting, and personalized planning.
- 3. Promotes Consistency and Excellence**
Standardizes expectations across roles and programs, ensuring high-quality service delivery.
- 4. Aligns with National Standards**
Integrates the CCSA and CanMEDS frameworks, ensuring interprofessional staff development with recognized Canadian benchmarks.
- 5. Encourages Lifelong Learning**
Supports continuous growth at all stages of a career, from foundational to advanced proficiency.
- 6. Fosters Reflection and Accountability**
Encourages regular review, feedback, and documentation of progress.
- 7. Enhances Team Collaboration**
Clarifies roles and competencies, strengthening interprofessional teamwork and communication.

This professional development framework and learning plan is designed to support competency growth and recovery-oriented practice. It is not intended to replace existing organizational learning plans or annual performance development processes, but to complement them.

How to Use the Learning Plan

The learning plan is part of an annual professional development cycle and includes the following key steps:

1. Self-Assessment

- Reflect on your current knowledge, skills, and behaviours.
- Use the CCSA Competency Dictionary and CanMEDS roles to assess your proficiency.
- Identify which competencies are most relevant to your role.

2. Prioritize Competency Areas

- Focus on 2–3 priority areas that align with your current responsibilities or future goals.
- Consider feedback from supervisors, peers, or individuals accessing services.

3. Set SMART Goals

- Goals should be:
 - Specific
 - Measurable
 - Achievable
 - Relevant
 - Time-bound
- Example: “Improve my proficiency level in understanding the neurobiological effects of trauma and violence and basic emotion regulation strategies such as grounding by completing a recognized training course and applying it in practice within 6 months.”

4. Align with Frameworks

Ensure your goals reflect one or both:

- **CCSA Competencies** (technical and behavioural)
- **CanMEDS Roles** (e.g., Communicator, Collaborator, Scholar)

Dual alignment ensures your development is both skill-based and role-informed.

5. Document and Review

- Use the Recovery Alberta Competency-Based Learning Plan template.
- Review progress regularly with your manager or supervisor.
- Update goals as your role or interests evolve.

Who Should Use a Learning Plan?

Everyone. Whether you are:

- New to the field and building foundational skills
- An experienced professional seeking to deepen your expertise
- A leader mentoring others and shaping system-level change

Whether you are a regulated or non-regulated health professional, a learning plan helps you enhance your clinical competency with purpose and impact. The Recovery Alberta Competency-Based Professional Development Framework and Learning Plan Guide can aid regulated health professionals in meeting their Medical/Regulatory College's continuing competency requirements (e.g., physicians, nurses, social workers, psychologists, etc.).

Developing Your Learning Plan: A Step-by-Step Guide

The Recovery Alberta Competency-Based Learning Plan is more than a tool, it's a commitment to excellence, growth, and compassionate care. This section outlines how to create and implement your learning plan using a structured, reflective, and personalized approach.

Step 1: Self-Assessment

Reflecting on your past year of work helps identify your strengths, areas for improvement, and future goals. Use the following questions to guide your reflection:

Reflect on the past year:

- What career goals were you aiming for?
- What knowledge and skills were you focused on developing?
- What did you do to develop these?
- How have you integrated them into your work?
- What did you achieve in your professional growth?
- What areas would you still like to grow in?

Plan for the year ahead:

- What are your career goals or aspirations?
- What knowledge or skills do you admire in senior colleagues?
- How do you learn best? (e.g., group vs. self-learning, online vs. in-person)
- What skills do you want to develop?
- What knowledge do you want to gain?

Step 2: Learning Plan Development

After identifying your top 2–3 technical and behavioural competencies to focus on, begin building your learning plan.

Set SMART Goals

Your goals should be:

- Specific



- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-bound

Example Goal:

- Goal: Enhance cultural safety and awareness. Example: improve my understanding of the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada or increase my knowledge about Indigenous cultural practices in my geographical area.
- Action Plan: Attend workshops and training sessions on Indigenous health and addiction issues. Engage in community consultations and seek mentorship.
- Timeline: Complete at least two relevant training sessions by the end of the fiscal year.

Timelines

Set realistic timelines for each goal and learning activity.

Resources Needed

Identify what you'll need to succeed—time, funding, materials, access to training or supervision, etc.

Step 3: Professional Development Activities

Choose learning activities that align with your goals and learning style. Examples include:

- Workshops.
- Peer learning.
- Mentorship.
- Online courses.
- Self-directed study.

Professional development activities may be influenced by financial and operational considerations. Staff are encouraged to collaborate with leadership to identify meaningful learning opportunities and explore available supports.

Step 4: Portfolio & Documentation

Maintain a record of your learning and development. Use tools like MyLearningLink or keep certificates and notes. After each activity, reflect on:

- What you learned.
- How you applied it.
- What outcomes did you observe?
- Any documentation or proof of completion.

Step 5: Evaluation & Feedback

Regularly evaluate your progress and seek feedback from supervisors or peers. Adjust your goals as needed based on:

- Performance reviews
- Clinical supervision feedback
- Peer mentoring
- Coaching conversations
- Evolving practice needs

Recovery Alberta Competency-Based Learning Plan

See the appendix for a sample template of the Recovery Alberta Competency-Based Learning Plan or [download the fillable PDF template here](#) to begin your competency assessment.

Remember that not all competencies are required for all jobs; only determine the proficiency of competencies that fit your job profile.

Summary: Applying Your Learning Plan

Creating a competency-based learning plan is a meaningful step toward personal and professional growth. By engaging in structured reflection, setting SMART goals, and aligning with recognized frameworks like CCSA and CanMEDS, staff can build a development path that is both purposeful and relevant to their role.

This process encourages ownership of learning, supports continuous improvement, and strengthens the quality of care delivered across Recovery Alberta. Whether you're new to the field or advancing into leadership, your learning plan is a tool to help you grow with intention, contribute effectively, and stay aligned with evolving standards and expectations.

References

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (2023). *Technical Competencies for Canada's Substance Use and Mental Health Workforce V.4.*

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Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. (2015). *CanMEDS Framework.*

<https://www.royalcollege.ca/en/standards-and-accreditation/canmeds.html>

Understanding the Competencies | Workforce Competencies. (2025).

<https://competencies.ccsa.ca/en/understanding-competencies>

Appendix A: Recovery Alberta Competency-Based Learning Plan

This Learning Plan is designed to guide your professional development over the coming year. It includes sections for self-assessment, goal setting, and planning of learning activities. Use this template to reflect on your current competencies, set SMART goals, and outline the steps you will take to achieve them.

Unlike general organizational learning plans used for annual performance development—which focus on job-specific goals and HR metrics such as training hours completed, performance review scores, or compliance with mandatory courses, this learning plan template emphasizes technical skill-building, professional identity formation, and interprofessional excellence. It aligns with national frameworks and is intended to complement—not replace—existing performance development processes.

Note: Sample entries are provided below for illustration purposes only.

1. Employee/Participant Information

Field	Details
Name	
Position/Role	
Department/Team	
Supervisor	
Date Created	
Review Date	

2. Self-Assessment

Use this section to reflect on your current strengths and areas for development.

a. Strengths and Key Competencies

What skills, knowledge, qualities, or achievements do you feel most confident about in your current role?

b. Areas for Growth

Where would you like to improve or gain new knowledge or skills?

c. Career Aspirations

What are your short and long-term career goals?

d. Learning Preferences

How do you prefer to learn (e.g., hands-on, coaching, online, self-study)?

3. Skills and Competencies to Develop

Recovery Alberta supports competency development through two complementary frameworks:

- [CCSA Competency Framework](#): Provides a detailed guide to technical and behavioural skills essential for recovery-oriented care.
- [CanMEDS Framework](#): Defines seven professional roles that support holistic development across disciplines, including communication, collaboration, leadership, and advocacy.

Regulated health professionals (e.g., physicians, nurses, psychologists, social workers) align their learning objectives with their regulatory college and Standards of Practice. They may use the CCSA framework to target specific competencies and the CanMEDS roles to support broader professional growth.

Non-regulated health professionals (e.g., addiction counsellors, recovery coaches, peer support workers) are encouraged to use the CCSA framework to guide their development and may reference CanMEDS roles to strengthen interprofessional skills and values.

Together, these frameworks support:

- Technical skill development
- Professional identity formation
- Interdisciplinary collaboration

CCSA Competencies

Technical Competencies	Behavioural Competencies
Understanding Co-occurring Substance Use and Mental Health Concerns	Adaptability and Flexibility
Understanding Mental Health	Analytical Thinking and Decision Making
Understanding Substance Use	Collaboration and Network Building
Accountability	Continuous Learning
Collaborative Care Planning	Creativity and Innovation
Community Development	Culturally Competent and Equity-Informed Approach
Counselling	Developing Others
Families, Caregivers and Social Supports	Effective Communication
Group Facilitation	Ethical Conduct and Professionalism
Medications	Interpersonal Rapport
Outreach	Leadership
Prevention and Health Promotion	Person-Centred Care
Program Development, Implementation & Evaluation	Planning and Organizing
Record Keeping and Documentation	Self Care
Referral	Self-Management
Risk Assessment and Crisis Intervention	Self-Motivation
Screening and Assessment	Teamwork and Cooperation
Trauma and Violence-Informed Care	

The CanMEDS Roles:

1. **Medical Expert:** Apply medical knowledge and clinical skills to deliver high-quality patient care.
2. **Communicator:** Communicate clearly, compassionately, and respectfully to support shared decision-making.
3. **Collaborator:** Work effectively within interprofessional teams to ensure coordinated, safe care.
4. **Leader:** Drive positive change and manage resources to improve healthcare systems.
5. **Health Advocate:** Address health inequities and support patients and communities in achieving better health.
6. **Scholar:** Commit to lifelong learning, teaching, and applying evidence-based practices.
7. **Professional:** Uphold ethical standards, integrity, and accountability in all professional actions.

Review the CCSA technical and behavioural competencies and/or the CanMEDS roles to assess your required, current, and/or desired level of proficiency from foundational to advanced.

1 - Foundational 2 - Developing 3 - Proficient 4 – Advanced.

Skill/Competency/CanMeds Professional Role	Current Proficiency	Desired Proficiency	Priority (High/Med/Low)
Trauma and Violence-Informed Care	Foundational	Developing	High
CanMeds role- Leader	Foundational	Developing	Med

4. Learning Activities

Note: Professional development activities may be influenced by financial and operational considerations. Staff are encouraged to collaborate with leadership to identify meaningful learning opportunities and explore available supports.

Skill/Competency/ CanMeds Professional Role/Growth Area	Goal	Activity Type (Course, Workshop, Coaching, On-the- Job)	Provider/Resou rce	Timeframe	Status	Notes
Trauma and Violence-Informed Care	“Improve my proficiency level in understandin g the neurobiologi cal effects of trauma and violence and basic emotion regulation strategies such as grounding by completing a recognized training course and applying it in practice within 6 months.”	Trauma and Violence-Informed Care eLearning modules	Recovery Alberta- free	Complete within the next 3 months	Incomplete	
CanMeds role- Leader	Improve my change management	PROSCI basic course	Available on MLL- free	Complete within the next 4 months	Incomplete	

	skills by completing the basic PROSCI course within the next 4 months and applying the concepts with my team within 6 months.					

5. Application and Practice Plan

Skill/Concept	How It Will Be Applied	Setting/Project	Timeline
Grounding strategies	In session with individuals I work with who are struggling with emotion regulation	In clinic	Within 6 months
Change management strategies	As applicable with my team in order to support smooth, positive change processes.	Team meetings/individual meetings	Within 6 months

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6. Measurement and Evaluation

SMART Goal	Success Indicator(s)	Method of Evaluation (e.g., feedback, performance review)	Review Date
“Improve my proficiency level in understanding the neurobiological effects of trauma and violence and basic emotion regulation strategies such as grounding by completing a recognized training course and applying it in practice within 6 months.”	Understanding of the neurobiological effects of trauma and violence Knowledge about basic emotion regulation strategies such as grounding	eLearning course completed Identify instances where grounding was used in practice within 6 months of training.	
Improve my change management skills by completing the basic PROSCI course within the next 4 months and	Application of the PROSCI principles with my team. Positive feedback from my team about the change process.	PROSCI course completed Identify when PROSCI principles were used with my team within 6 months of training.	

applying the concepts with my team within 6 months.			

7. Progress Review & Reflections

Use this section during regular check-ins to review and update your plan.

Date	Reflections / Notes	Adjustments Needed	Reviewed By
	I was unable to complete the eLearning modules within 3 months	Extend timeframe of goal by 3 months.	
	I was able to complete the PROSCI course within a month.	Reduce the timeframe of the goal by 1 month.	