

# **Model Standards for Telepsychology Service: An Advisory for Psychological Practice**

**(adopted December 9, 2011)**

At the December 2011 meeting of the Council of the College of Psychologists of Ontario, the *Model Standards for Telepsychology Service*, developed by the Association of Canadian Psychology Regulatory Organizations (ACPRO), were adopted as an *Advisory for Psychological Practice*. As an *Advisory* these are not incorporated into the College's Standards of Professional Conduct, but rather are provided as advice to members regarding important issues to be carefully considered in offering telepsychology services. Telepsychology relates to services provided both within Ontario and across jurisdictional boundaries; however some issues are specifically relevant when cross-border services are contemplated.

In developing the Model Standards, ACPRO's goal was to seek consistency in standards and expectations among regulatory Colleges and Boards across Canada regarding the delivery of telepsychology services. As Model Standards, they reflect a consensus on this important regulatory issue. As ACPRO Model Standards, they have no force unless and until they are adopted by the individual Canadian regulatory College or Board.

At this time, the College of Psychologist of Ontario has chosen to adopt the ACPRO Model Standards as advice to members. These may be incorporated into the Standards of Professional Conduct in the future but this would follow extensive member consultation regarding usefulness, clarity, comprehensiveness and applicability to practice.

The ACPRO document *Model Standards for Telepsychology Service* is reproduced in full as it provides both background information and context for the Model Standards. Please note that ACPRO, as a pan-Canadian organization, chose to use the term "psychologist" to include all practitioners of psychological services, reflecting the variety of terms for currently in use across the country.



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## **Model Standards for Telepsychology Service Delivery Adopted June 4, 2011**

Member organizations of the Association of Canadian Psychology Regulatory Organizations (ACPRO) are committed to ensuring the delivery of competent and ethical psychological services by licensed practitioners. Serving and protecting the public interest is the foundational responsibility of all member organizations. This is achieved in part through the establishment of standards with regard to the provision of psychological services, regardless of the medium of service delivery employed.

Model Standards adopted by ACPRO are intended to reflect consensus on important regulatory issues of mutual concern and to assist member jurisdictions. It is understood that Model Standards have no force outside of official adoption by a member jurisdiction.

### ***Preamble:***

Over the last decade there has been an evolution in terms of the modalities used to deliver health services, where services are no longer necessarily delivered in-person. This evolution has been spurred in part by innovations in communication technologies, the increased sophistication of health consumers in terms of their expectations for service and accessibility to services, and increased demands for service.

Telepsychology can be defined as “the use of information and communications technology to deliver psychological services and information over large and small distances” (adapted from Picot, 1998)<sup>1</sup>. Practice within psychology using this modality would include all client-centered services, consultation, supervision of students/professionals/colleagues, and education of the public and/or other professionals.

### ***Standards:***

Regardless of the modality used for service delivery, psychologists<sup>2</sup> are expected to practice according to the Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.) or the code de déontologie (Québec), standards for practice within their home jurisdiction, and according to local laws and regulations. While there are many practice issues of commonality between telepsychology and in-person service delivery, there are practice issues unique to providing services via tele-technologies. Psychologists are reminded of the following practice issues that should be considered in providing any psychological service:

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<sup>1</sup> Picot, J. (1998) *Sector Competitiveness Frameworks Series: Telehealth Industry Part 1 – Overview and Prospects*. Industry Canada: Industry Sector Health Industries (as cited in National Initiative for Telehealth Guidelines - Environmental Scan of Organizational, Technology, Clinical and Human Resource Issues, April 2003, Canadian Society of Telehealth)

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this document the term “psychologist” includes all practitioners of psychology who are licensed/registered by a Canadian psychology regulatory body (e.g., psychological associate, provisional psychologist, psychological candidate)

1. Respect for the Dignity of Persons
2. Responsible Caring
3. Integrity in Relationships
4. Responsibility to Society
5. Responsibility to do no harm.
6. Practice within one's area(s) of competence, including medium of service delivery.
7. Responsibility to remain current with regard to the research/literature in the field.
8. Appropriate choice of treatment, including treatment modality and medium of delivery, based on a thorough assessment of client situation and need. Decisions about choice of treatment, modality, and medium reflect the highest appropriate standard of care.
9. Informed consent including but not limited to:
  - a. Discussion of the assessment and intervention approaches and modalities to be used, and the pros and cons of such approaches, delivered via such modalities.
  - b. Discussion regarding the maintenance of records, including electronic records, e.g. security, access, retention policy
  - c. Discussion regarding confidentiality and duty to report
  - d. Confirmation of the client's informed consent, either through use of a written and signed consent form, or via electronic alternatives.
10. Honesty and integrity in relationships
11. Privacy and confidentiality
12. Record maintenance and storage
13. Planning for services in the event of an emergency, including how to contact the psychologist, and alternative services locally available to the client
14. Boundaries
15. Security of Tests
16. Liability Insurance
17. Conflict of Interest
18. Psychologists must be sensitive to cultural/regional/local issues which may impact service delivery, and this is especially critical when the psychologist is not familiar with the clientele or area being served.
19. Protection for Vulnerable Persons
20. Establishment of policies and procedures regarding the following:
  - a. General Service Provision
  - b. Emergency Services/Coverage
  - c. Records (maintenance, access, retention, security)
  - d. Transfer of Services (retirement, death, close of practice, services no longer wanted)
  - e. Client Verification
  - f. Technology Maintenance Plan
  - g. Outcome Evaluation Plan

In addition to the general responsibilities for providing psychological services as noted above, the following must be observed in the provision of services via telepsychology:

1. Psychologists will be licensed in "good standing" within the jurisdiction in which they reside. If holding provisional/candidate licensure, psychologists will be supervised in all telepsychology practice by a psychologist licensed in "good standing" within the jurisdiction. As such the expectation is that psychologists conform to any and all rules, regulations, and standards established within the home jurisdiction.
2. Psychologists delivering telepsychology services outside of their home jurisdiction will ensure they are legally entitled to do so.

3. Psychologists will inform clients who they may complain to if there is a problem, providing the contact information for the responsible regulatory body.
4. Psychologists will be familiar with the local jurisprudence and standards for practice in the jurisdiction in which the service is being delivered. Where there is a conflict between such laws/regulations/standards and those of psychologists' home jurisdiction, psychologists must act according to the higher standard.
5. Psychologists delivering telepsychology services outside of their home jurisdiction will ensure they carry appropriate liability insurance with respect to such service.
6. Psychologists will be competent in the technology of the service delivery medium.
7. To minimize the possibility of someone impersonating a client and gaining access to confidential health information, or influencing a psychologist's assessment or opinion of the client, psychologists will use some form of coded identification of the client in cases where live visual verification is not possible.
8. Psychologists will make plans with clients regarding what will happen in the event of technological failure.

