



# Introduction to Competencies: Factsheet for Leaders

## Introduction

The substance use and mental health (SUMH) workforce in Canada consists of individuals with diverse roles, backgrounds and skills. This diversity brings a wealth of perspectives, experiences and approaches that are crucial for meeting the needs of people living in Canada. It also underscores the need for clear and consistent standards to ensure high-quality care and services. A competency-based approach to workforce management enables organizations to do this by setting guidelines for roles across various proficiency levels.

## What are Competencies?

Competencies are collections of knowledge, skills, behaviours and other attributes that employees need to perform effectively in a function or role. Using specific, observable examples of actions in the workplace, competencies can provide more clarity to employees regarding job expectations and more objective criteria to organizations for workforce management decisions.

Competencies can be used as the basis for various workforce management activities, such as for hiring, training, professional development, performance management and succession planning. Competencies bring consistency and structure to workforce management activities and help align workforce practices with organizational goals and strategies.

## The Case for Competencies

By defining competencies for employees, you can:

- Communicate what effective performance looks like in objective, measurable terms;
- Set objective standards, reduce biases and remove barriers in hiring, training and performance evaluation;
- Ensure alignment between employee behaviours and organizational values and goals;
- Improve structure and consistency in workforce management practices; and
- Support a consistent standard of care across Canada.



Competencies have a measurable impact on organizational outcomes.

**Figure 1. Competencies Provide the Foundation of Various Workforce Management Activities**



**Figure 2. Measurable Impact of Competencies on Organizational Outcomes**

<p><b>Talent Retention</b></p> <p>Organizations that use competencies have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>40%</b> lower turnover among high performers</li><li><b>17%</b> lower overall voluntary turnover</li></ul>	<p><b>Employee Performance</b></p> <p>Organizations that use competencies have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>19%</b> improvement in employee performance</li></ul>
<p><b>Talent Attraction</b></p> <p>Organizations that use competencies have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>87%</b> greater ability to hire the best people</li></ul>	<p><b>Business Agility</b></p> <p>Organizations that use competencies have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>144%</b> greater ability to plan for future workforce needs</li><li><b>156%</b> greater ability to develop great leaders</li></ul>

(Garr, 2012)



## CCSA’s Technical and Behavioural Competencies for Canada’s Substance Use and Mental Health Workforce

CCSA offers competency-based resources and tools to support Canada’s integrated SUMH workforces. They outline the technical and behavioural skills, attitudes and behaviours most relevant to working in the SUMH field across a range of roles, sectors and settings, and provides templates for applying them in interviews and performance management.

Using the behavioural and technical competencies together provides a holistic picture of what is required to provide care that is technically sound, dignifying and humanizing.

**Figure 3. Defining Behavioural and Technical Competencies**

Behavioural Competencies	Technical Competencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attributes, behaviours and skills that facilitate dignifying and humanizing care experiences</li><li>• Soft skills</li><li>• Acquired wisdom related to a role, function or setting</li><li>• Examples include communication, culturally safe and anti-oppressive care</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Technical knowledge and skills specific to roles or professions</li><li>• Hard skills</li><li>• Acquired in training, education, academia, lived experience, traditional knowledge keeping, etc.</li><li>• Examples include understanding substance use, screening and assessment</li></ul>

Check out the content in the competency Understanding Substance Use (Figure 4), a multi-level technical competency. This shows how different roles have clarity of the level of expertise expected of them which can assist in hiring and performance management. It also outlines the skills and knowledge that may be expected of an individual if they’d like to advance to a more senior position.

For more details, visit the [Workforce Competencies website](#).



**Figure 4. Example of a multi-level technical competency “Understanding Substance Use”**

Background and contextual knowledge of substances and substance use as defined in the competencies, including the neurological effects of different substances and the impact of use on cognitive function, physical and mental health, and as required to properly inform specific aspects of a service provider’s role and scope of work with individuals.

1 = Foundational	2 = Developing	3 = Proficient	4 = Advanced
<p>1. Describes in general terms what substance use is and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Its impact on mental and physical function</li> <li>b) The various factors (risk and protective) that influence substance use</li> <li>c) Its prevalence in Canada</li> </ul> <p>2. Describes the types of substances often used in the community</p> <p>3. Explains the social determinants of health that have an impact on individuals who use substances and their families and communities, and identifies some of those key factors (e.g., genetics, sex, gender, poverty, income, housing insecurity, mental health concerns, race)</p> <p>4. Explains key processes that exacerbate</p>	<p>1. Applies evidence-informed approaches to assess the severity of an individual’s substance use and any other co-existing issues (e.g., physical, mental, social, multiple substance use issues)</p> <p>2. Explains how substances that alter mood, behaviour and cognitive processes are categorized or classed (e.g., stimulant or sedative), and cites the proper and street names (if applicable) for key drugs within those categories or classes</p> <p>3. Explains the range of factors that can increase risk or protection against developing substance use concerns, and works with individuals to identify such factors in their</p>	<p>1. Explains and applies an understanding of the social determinants of health that work alone or together to increase or mitigate risk, and how these factors may vary in different populations and cultures</p> <p>2. Explains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The biopsychosocial basis of substance use and how it can impact cognitive function, cognitive development, physical health and mental health</li> <li>b) The neurological, physiological and behavioural impacts of different substances</li> <li>c) The biopsychosocial and spiritual risk and protective factors for development of substance use concerns</li> </ul>	<p>1. Mentors or supports others in developing their knowledge of causality, prevention, symptoms, treatment options, and support of and for substance use, and integrates this new knowledge in one’s own work with individuals receiving services</p> <p>2. Mentors or supports colleagues working with complex and sensitive cases that require a comprehensive understanding of all aspects of substance use and co-occurring concerns</p> <p>3. Initiates, facilitates or participates in collaborative exploration and learning that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Improves approaches to the prevention, screening and assessment, and treatment and support of substance use</li> </ul>



Other tools include:

- Competency-Based Hiring
- Job Clusters
- Performance Management
- Specific Populations

## **Competencies in Action: How Competencies Have Benefited Organizations**

### **Values and Culture**

Instill organizational values and culture into everyday work.

- Competencies can be used to translate high-level, abstract value statements into concrete, observable behaviours, which helps to align employee behaviours with organizational values.

### **Managing Change**

Help employees understand and navigate changes.

- When organizations are going through changes, competencies can be a useful tool to communicate new expectations in tangible terms.

### **Recruitment**

Hire the right people using a valid and fair interview process.

- Competencies help managers and recruiters focus on the true requirements of the role and reduce barriers for equity-deserving groups.
- This is particularly relevant for individuals who have developed expertise from a variety of avenues (e.g., lived experience, social services, medical services).

### **Learning and Development**

Support targeted learning and development.

- Competency assessments help identify strengths and growth opportunities for employees.
- This information can be used to create learning and professional development plans, and to identify targeted learning activities and resources.
- Competency-based learning plans support an organizations' values and improve the alignment between employees and their roles.

### **Performance Management**

Define effective performance in clear, specific and observable goals.



- Competencies provide managers and employees with a common language about performance expectations.

## Career Growth

Engage employees and promote career growth.

- When competency profiles are identified for different roles in the organization, employees can use the information to understand how they can enhance performance in their current roles as well as how to navigate potential next steps in their careers.

## Needs Planning

Provide meaningful data for strategic planning.

- When competency assessments are conducted across the whole organization, leaders will gain a comprehensive understanding of the existing strengths and skill gaps in their workforce.
- This supports the comparison between the existing competency mix and the current and future workforce requirements, which helps to inform workforce and succession planning.
- The resulting data can be used to inform workforce development strategies, to identify potential employees for key roles and to develop plans to ensure their future readiness.

If you are planning on implementing the competencies or have begun implementing the competency framework, feel free to email our team at [competencies@ccsa.ca](mailto:competencies@ccsa.ca) for questions or support.

## Reference

Garr, S. S. (2012, October 15). Integrated talent management: A roadmap for success.

*Bersin and Associates Research Bulletin.*

[https://www.academia.edu/7874056/BERSIN\\_and\\_ASSOCIATES\\_2012\\_IntegratedTalent\\_Management\\_A\\_RoadmapforSuccess\\_AbouttheAuthor](https://www.academia.edu/7874056/BERSIN_and_ASSOCIATES_2012_IntegratedTalent_Management_A_RoadmapforSuccess_AbouttheAuthor)

### About CCSA

CCSA was created by Parliament to provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we provide national guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives.

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