

Clinical and mental health specialist psychologists

This paper provides guidelines for competencies in terms of essential qualifications and experience for the role of a clinical and mental health specialist psychologist. In addition to specifying the criteria for this title, the paper attempts to predict numbers of psychologists in Australia who could meet these criteria based on APS membership data.

In order to assist in understanding the context for these guidelines, some background information on specialist psychologist training in Australia and criteria for registration as a psychologist and membership of the APS is provided.

For more details on these guidelines, contact Professor Lyn Littlefield, APS Executive Director.

Registration to practise and specialist psychologist training in Australia

In order to practise as a psychologist in Australia, registration with a State or Territory Registration Board is required. Minimum requirements for registration as a psychologist are a four year degree in psychology plus two years' supervised experience. There are currently approximately 19,000 registered psychologists in Australia. In recent years, the majority of psychologists registering have postgraduate qualifications in psychology totalling six years of training, which incorporates the two years' supervised experience to enable registration. Most postgraduate professional psychological programs involve some general training in mental health, although some specialise solely in other areas of psychology such as organisational psychology. A very conservative estimate of the number of registered psychologists in Australia with skills in mental health would be 10,000.

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is the professional association for psychologists in Australia. Approximately two-thirds of all registered psychologists in Australia are members of the APS. The APS now requires a six-year degree (four years of undergraduate psychology plus a masters degree in psychology) for full membership of the Society. There are nine specialist Colleges within the APS: the Colleges of Clinical Psychologists, Clinical Neuropsychologists, Community Psychologists, Counselling Psychologists, Educational and Developmental Psychologists, Forensic Psychologists, Health Psychologists, Organisational Psychologists, and Sport Psychologists. Membership of the APS specialist Colleges requires a masters degree (two-year postgraduate degree) in that speciality plus one year's supervised experience, or a professional doctorate degree in the speciality (three-year postgraduate degree).

Members of the College of Clinical Psychologists are specialised mental health psychologists, with postgraduate training in clinical masters or doctorate degrees and supervised experience in mental health settings. Many of the other postgraduate professional training programs contain units and practical placements equivalent to those in clinical masters degrees, although they may have a specialist focus in other areas. Hence their graduates would qualify as mental health specialists although they may not be called clinical psychologists.

Criteria for competency as a clinical and mental health specialist psychologist

Competency to be considered a clinical and mental health specialist psychologist may be met by two groups of psychologists via different pathways.

Group 1: All psychologists with professional masters degrees (or professional doctorate degrees) with the specific training and experience to meet the criteria for a clinical and mental health specialist set out below.

Training (automatically met by membership of the College of Clinical Psychologists)

- Specified training¹ in the following areas:

Psychopathology (including assessment and diagnosis)	50 hours
Counselling skills	25 hours
Psychotherapy/psychological interventions	50 hours

Experience

- Two years' clinical experience post-registration in a mental health setting

Group 1 would include the following:

- all members of the APS College of Clinical Psychology
- members of other APS Colleges who meet the training and experience criteria
- other psychologists with specialist postgraduate training who meet the training and experience criteria above.

Group 2: All psychologists who have completed a four-year undergraduate degree in psychology, plus two years of supervised practice, are registered and have met, by a variety of means, the specific training and experience criteria below.

Training

- Specified professional training in the following areas:

Psychopathology (including assessment and diagnosis)	50 hours
Counselling skills	25 hours
Psychotherapy/psychological interventions	50 hours

Experience

- Five years clinical experience in a mental health setting after full registration as a psychologist.

¹ Based upon specified tertiary course hours normally completed over a 13-week term.

² Includes members of APS College of Clinical Psychology and an estimated number of other APS members (including members of other Colleges) who would be likely to meet the clinical and mental health specialist psychologist criteria

³ Based on the just over a third of Australian Psychologists who are not APS members. A profile based on APS members has been projected onto this group to gain an estimated figure for masters graduates who might meet the clinical and mental health specialist criteria.

⁴ This estimation is a much more difficult figure to predict. However, we are confident that it is not greater than this.

⁵ It has been estimated that of psychologists currently practising in a specialist area, 40% were in private practice and an additional 60% in the public sector. However, 39% of the latter group also offer some private practice work.

⁶ 70% of our APS members are located in metropolitan regions and some 30% in the regional and rural areas. For the specialist groups nominated above, it is estimated that some 75% are in metropolitan areas and 25% in regional and rural areas

Estimated numbers of clinical and mental health specialist psychologists

The estimated numbers of psychologists (members of the APS and non-members) who meet the competency criteria for a clinical and mental health specialist psychologist are set out below.

Group 1

Psychologists with professional masters degrees who meet the training and experience criteria

APS members ²	1875
Non-APS members ³	<u>1250</u>
Total	3125

Group 2

Four-year trained psychologists who meet the training and experience criteria

APS members ⁴	1500
Non-APS members ³	<u>1000</u>
Total	2500
<u>TOTAL</u> (Groups 1 and 2)	<u>5625</u>

The location of psychologists practising in Australia

The tables below identify some estimates for the location and settings of clinical and mental health specialist psychologists.

Table 1: Location and type of practice for Group 1

<i>Zone/Sector</i>	<i>Private practice⁵</i>	<i>Public sector only</i>	<i>Public sector plus PP</i>	
Metropolitan ⁶	938	914	493	2345
Regional/rural	312	304	164	780
TOTAL	1250	1218	657	3125

PP = Private Practice

Table 2: Location and type of practice for Group 1 and 2 combined

<i>Zone/Sector</i>	<i>Private practice</i>	<i>Public sector only</i>	<i>Public sector plus PP</i>	
Metropolitan	1688	1518	1013	4219
Regional/rural	562	507	337	1406
TOTAL	2250	2025	1350	5625

PP = Private practice