

Instructions for Use: Advocating for Fair Mental Health Standards

Thank you for standing with the Vocational Mental Health Practitioners Association of Australia (VMHPAA) in calling for fair, inclusive, and evidence-informed national standards for our profession.

We've created a set of pre-drafted letter templates that you can personalise and send to your **local Federal Member of Parliament** and **State Senators**. Every letter helps raise awareness and encourage the Department of Health and Aged Care to reconsider their exclusion of AQF Level 5 qualified counsellors in the Draft National Standards for Counsellors and Psychotherapists (2024).

How to Use These Templates

1. Choose a Letter Template:

- **General Appeal:** A broad overview of the issue and call for inclusion.
- **Legal & Equity Concerns:** Focuses on legal inconsistencies and fairness.
- **Workforce Impact:** Highlights displacement of women and mature-aged workers.
- **Access & Diversity:** Emphasises risks to community care and service access.

2. Customise Your Details:

- Fill in your **name, professional credentials, and electorate**.
- Personalise one or two sentences to reflect your **own experience** e.g., where you work, how long you've been practising, or how this change would impact your clients.

3. Find Your Local MP and Senators:

- Use the official **Parliament of Australia search tool**:
https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Parliamentarian_Search_Results?q=&m=1&par=-1&gen=0&ps=0
- Locate your **House of Representatives Member** by entering your suburb or postcode.
- Don't forget to also contact your **State's Senators** you have 12 per state, 2 per each territory (NT and ACT) and all can be approached.

4. Send Your Letter:

- Email is easiest, most MPs and Senators provide a direct email address on their profile page.
- Alternatively, print and post a hard copy. Personal mail is often taken seriously.

5. Share Your Advocacy:

- Let us know you've sent a letter by emailing **ceo@vmhpaa.org.au**.
- Share your advocacy on social media (if you're comfortable), and encourage colleagues to do the same using hashtags like **#FairStandardsNow** and **#MentalHealthMatters**. Oh and **#VMHPAA**

Need Support?

If you're unsure how to proceed or want help crafting a more personalised message, please reach out. We're here to support you every step of the way.

Together, we can ensure vocationally trained counsellors continue to serve the community with dignity, recognition, and professional respect.

VMHPAA Team
info@vmhpaa.org.au
www.vmhpaa.org.au

Letter 1: General Appeal – Inclusion and Collaboration

Subject: Protecting Diversity and Inclusion in Mental Health Standards

Dear [Representative's Name],

I am writing to raise concern regarding the proposed Draft National Standards for Counsellors and Psychotherapists (November 2024), which, despite good intentions, risk excluding thousands of experienced, safe, and ethical practitioners like myself.

These draft standards propose to restrict AQF Level 5 qualified professionals from private practice and supervision, despite our long history of competent service delivery across aged care, education, NDIS, and community settings. This move lacks both legal foundation and evidentiary support. It also occurred without meaningful consultation when you look at the numbers of participants in the consultation compared to the known numbers in the counselling workforce.

I respectfully urge you to advocate for an inclusive redrafting process that recognises the proven safety and value of vocationally trained professionals. National standards must reflect workforce realities, not arbitrary thresholds, and should not dismantle essential supports to already vulnerable communities.

Sincerely,
[Your Full Name]
[Your Credentials/Role]
[Constituent of X Electorate]

Letter 2: Legal and Equity Concerns

Subject: Concerns about Legal Validity and Fair Access in Mental Health Standards

Dear [Representative's Name],

I am a vocationally qualified mental health professional, and I write to express concern regarding aspects of the Draft National Standards for Counsellors and Psychotherapists (2024). These standards propose to exclude AQF Level 5 Diploma-qualified counsellors from private practice and supervision, despite no statutory or clinical evidence supporting such a move.

This exclusion may constitute an unlawful restraint of trade, risks indirect discrimination under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, and could potentially breach the Fair Work Act by arbitrarily limiting professional recognition and employment.

Moreover, the standards were developed without input from such peak bodies as the Vocational Mental Health Practitioners Association of Australia (VMHPAA), despite its national representation of qualified practitioners like myself.

As your constituent, I ask you to support:

- Immediate revision of the exclusionary provisions (Focus Areas 1.3.1, 1.3.2, and 2.1.7),
- A full Regulatory Impact Statement, and
- A fair, transparent consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

Warm regards,
[Your Full Name]

[Your Credentials/Role]
[Constituent of X Electorate]

Letter 3: Workforce Impact & Gender Equity

Subject: Don't Displace a Safe, Skilled, and Diverse Mental Health Workforce

Dear [Representative's Name],

As a member of the mental health workforce, I am deeply concerned about the unintended consequences of the proposed Draft National Standards for Counsellors and Psychotherapists.

These standards unfairly exclude Diploma-qualified counsellors from practicing independently or offering supervision, despite:

- Decades of proven, complaint-free service across private and public sectors,
- No evidence that higher qualifications yield safer outcomes, and
- The high representation of women and mid-life professionals in the vocational counselling field (71% female; mostly aged 45–54).

Exclusion will disproportionately impact women, regional communities, and already stretched mental health services. These changes appear status-driven, not evidence-based, and they erode trust in our regulatory frameworks.

Please advocate for the redrafting of key clauses, inclusion of VMHPAA in consultations, and recognition of the vital role vocational practitioners play in our national mental health response.

Yours sincerely,
[Your Full Name]
[Your Credentials/Role]
[Constituent of X Electorate]

Letter 4: Community Access and Service Gaps

Subject: Help Prevent Mental Health Workforce Shortages by Supporting Vocational Practitioners

Dear [Representative's Name],

I write to request your urgent attention to the Draft National Standards for Counsellors and Psychotherapists, which, if implemented in their current form, will remove many qualified professionals from service delivery at a time when Australia can least afford it.

Vocationally trained counsellors have worked safely and ethically in schools, aged care, NDIS, and private practice for many years. Yet the draft standards propose to limit our scope without evidence of harm, proper legal review, or meaningful stakeholder engagement.

We are already facing a mental health service shortfall, especially in rural and regional areas. Removing qualified counsellors from the field will compound access issues and delay support for clients in crisis.

I urge you to support inclusive and practical standards that reflect clinical realities and protect access to care. Please support VMHPAA's request for a fair and collaborative redraft process.

Thank you,
[Your Full Name]
[Your Credentials/Role]
[Constituent of X Electorate]

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