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HUMAN GENETICS SOCIETY OF AUSTRALASIA

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Policy

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure minimum standards for continuing genetic counselling practice, and a transparent mechanism to demonstrate the competence of practicing MHGSA/FHGSA genetic counsellors. It outlines the requirements for entry into genetic counselling practice, sets minimum practice requirements for practitioners to maintain their skills and competency, and a supportive pathway for genetic counsellors to return to active practice after a period of time out of the profession.

2. NASRHP Definition of ‘practice’

For the purposes of regulation, the National Alliance of Self Regulating Health Professions (NASRHP) definition of practice has been adopted, as follows:

“[Practice]...indicates that an individual is drawing on their relevant professional skills and knowledge in the course of their work to contribute to safe and effective delivery of services within the profession.... It is not restricted to the provision of direct clinical care and may also include working in a direct nonclinical relationship with clients; working in management, administration, education, research, advisory, regulatory or policy development roles, for example. This work can be of a paid or formal volunteer nature on a full or part-time basis.”¹

3. Professional status

The HGSA grants the title Member of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia (MHGSA) in recognition that a genetic counsellor meets the minimum educational requirements to enter employment as a genetic counsellor in any area of genetic counselling practice.

MHGSA status is an essential requirement for genetic counsellors to pursue Fellow of the Human Genetics Society of Australasia (FHGSA) status. The HGSA grants FHGSA status to genetic counsellors who have demonstrated their achievement of the HGSA [Competency Standards for Genetic Counsellors](#) to the [Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling](#) through submissions and supervised practice.

The [HGSA Register of Genetic Counsellors](#) lists both MHGSA and FHGSA genetic counsellors, who are expected to meet minimum continuing education, continuing practice requirements and make mandatory declarations for annual registration.

4. Entry into Practice

4.1. Eligibility for MHGSA

Genetic counsellors who have completed a tertiary qualification in genetic counselling can apply to the [Professional Practice Committee](#) to be granted MHGSA status. All applicants must be financial members of the HGSA.

4.1.1. Master of Genetic Counselling

Graduates of an HGSA accredited two-year Master of Genetic Counselling program are considered sufficiently competent to practise as entry-level genetic counsellors under appropriate supervision (see the [Genetic Counselling Course Accreditation Committee](#) page of the HGSA website).

¹ NASRHP; *Self Regulating Health Profession Peak Bodies Membership Standards*; 2/12/2016

MHGSA is not automatically granted for graduates. It is recommended that graduates with a Masters of Genetic Counselling apply for MHGSA at the earliest opportunity. Applications may be submitted at any time and will be reviewed regularly by the [Professional Practice Committee](#).

4.1.2. Graduate Diploma Genetic Counsellors

Genetic counsellors who completed an accredited Graduate Diploma in Genetic Counselling prior to 2008 can also apply to the [Professional Practice Committee](#) for MHGSA status. This option will be obsolete after March 31st, 2023 – please see the [HGSA Transitional Provisions for Board Eligibility, Certification, and Registration for Genetic Counsellors](#).

4.1.3. Overseas trained and/or certified genetic counsellors

Genetic counsellors who have trained or certified overseas may apply to the [Professional Practice Committee](#) for MHGSA status. The Committee will consider the relevance and transferability of their postgraduate qualification in genetic counselling obtained from an overseas institution. Applicants who completed their qualification where English was not the first language of instruction and assessment may be required to provide evidence of English language proficiency (refer to the [English Language Requirements for Genetic Counsellors Policy](#)).

4.2. Submission requirements

Prior to submitting their documents and application online through the HGSA website, the applicant must apply and pay the appropriate fee. Once the application fee has been received the applicant will have access to the electronic submission forms. All fees including application and HGSA membership fees must be up to date at the time of application. Please ensure a current, regularly monitored email address is provided (for correspondence).

The submission must include:

- Proof of identity according to the requirements for the [Australian Federal Police 100 point checklist \(afp.gov.au\)](#).
- Evidence of a tertiary qualification in Genetic Counselling by providing:
 - Access to a secure online electronic copy of the applicant's academic transcript and granted qualification from the granting institution (e.g. via [My eQuals Australia](#)).
 - **Only if a secure electronic access is not available**, a copy of the academic transcript and qualification from the granting institution, which will be subject to primary source verification.
- Applicants who completed their qualification where English was not the first language of instruction and assessment may be required to provide evidence of English language proficiency (refer to the [English Language Requirements for Genetic Counsellors Policy](#)).

All applications will be reviewed and assessed by the [Professional Practice Committee](#). Applicants submitting incomplete or unclear applications will be notified by email and asked to resubmit their application.

4.3. MHGSA and Registration

Successful applicants will be formally advised by letter forwarded to their email address. They will then be entitled to use the title MHGSA. They will be automatically added to the HGSA [Register of Genetic Counsellors](#) with no additional fee until renewing their registration the following membership year. They will then be expected to meet annual CPD and practice requirements and make annual mandatory declarations to maintain their registration.

MHGSA genetic counsellors will be granted ACTIVE Registration as evidence that they meet entry-level requirements for employment as a genetic counsellor in Australia and New Zealand, and to undertake FHGSA certification in Genetic Counselling. After application to the [Certification Committee](#), MHGSA practitioners working towards FHGSA clinical certification will be granted PROVISIONAL registration status. See the [HGSA Clinical Certification Policy for Genetic Counsellors](#).

4.4. Unsuccessful applications

Unsuccessful applicants will be formally advised by letter forwarded to their email address. The letter will contain details regarding the reason/s for the unsuccessful application. The applicant will not be added to the Register of Genetic Counsellors. The application fee will not be refunded due to the administrative time required to assess the application. Applicants are strongly encouraged to read the eligibility and registration requirements prior to applying.

5. Registration status

The HGSA maintains a [Register of Genetic Counsellors](#) who are regulated by the [Board of Censors for Genetic Counselling](#). This register is intended to help clients and employers to identify genetic counsellors who have the appropriate education and training, and whose knowledge and skills are current.

5.1. Genetic counsellors with ACTIVE status

Any MHGSA or FHGSA genetic counsellor can apply for ACTIVE status to be listed on the [HGSA Register of Genetic Counsellors](#).

Genetic counsellors with ACTIVE status on the Register hold a tertiary qualification in genetic counselling recognised by the HGSA to enter practice as a genetic counsellor and meet annual requirements for registration. This applies to new graduates, and to genetic counsellors working in non-clinical areas of practice.

Genetic counsellors undertaking clinical practice as outlined in 6.3 Evidence of Practice (6.3.1 Clinically practicing genetic counsellors, page 6) should apply for clinical registration as described below.

5.2. Genetic counsellors with PROVISIONAL-CLINICAL status

PROVISIONAL-CLINICAL genetic counsellors are actively working in a clinical role. They are qualified to see clients in clinical practice with additional supervision and/or continuing professional development, and meet annual requirements for registration.

Upon commencing clinical practice, MHGSA genetic counsellors should apply to the [Certification Committee](#) to undertake Clinical Certification and be granted PROVISIONAL status.

FHGSA genetic counsellors participating in a Resumption of Practice program administered by the [Professional Practice Committee](#) will also be granted PROVISIONAL status.

5.3. Genetic counsellors with REGISTERED-CLINICAL status

REGISTERED-CLINICAL genetic counsellors have been granted FHGSA Clinical Certification in Genetic Counselling, are actively working in clinical practice, and meet annual requirements for registration.

6. Recency of Practice

Recency of Practice refers to the period of time over which an individual has used their professional

knowledge and skills, and the extent to which they have maintained their contemporary practice and competencies within a profession.

Where a certified practitioner cannot demonstrate recency of practice in line with the Policy, they must meet Resumption of Practice requirements to update their knowledge and skills and demonstrate their competence to practise in order to become recertified.

6.1. Practice hours

Any MHGSA or FHGSA genetic counsellor must be able to demonstrate at least 1000 hours of practice in a relevant role (see 2. NASRHP Definition of 'practice', page 3) in the previous five-year period in order to be considered as practising and to maintain their status on the [HGSA Register of Genetic Counsellors](#). This is not restricted to clinical practice, and includes practice in other areas (see 2. NASRHP Definition of 'practice', page 3).

Genetic counsellors who have been practicing for less than five years will need to demonstrate pro rata hours of practice equivalent to 200 hours per year since commencing practice.

For graduates of an HGSA Accredited Master of Genetic Counselling course, the practical placement and clinical practice-related activities achieved during their Master of Genetic Counselling program are sufficient to apply for active status within 3 years of graduation. Refer to the [Course Accreditation Policy for Masters of Genetic Counselling](#) for details of placement and clinical practice activity hours.

REGISTERED and PROVISIONAL clinical genetic counsellors must be able to demonstrate that their role includes direct clinical contact. For the purpose of this Policy, clinical contact is defined as per the Definition of Clinical Contact in the HGSA [Clinical Certification Policy for Genetic Counsellors](#).

6.2. Supervision in practice

Ongoing supervision is a foundation of reflective practice and is a requirement of genetic counselling practice. Actively practicing genetic counsellors will be required to provide evidence of appropriate supervision as defined in the HGSA [Supervision Policy for Genetic Counsellors](#).

6.3. Evidence of Practice

6.3.1. Clinically practicing genetic counsellors

Clinically practicing genetic counsellors must maintain and be able to provide:

- Written evidence of employment such as a record of employment or employment contract. Alternatively, if written evidence is not available one of the Referees' reports (below) can include details of hours worked.
- Evidence of supervision, as outlined in the HGSA [Supervision Policy for Genetic Counsellors](#). Supervision is a requirement for all practising genetic counsellors.

Referee's report, including hours of work and clinical contact hours (as defined in the [Clinical Certification Policy for Genetic Counsellors](#)), hours of attendance at supervision, and evidence that the candidate practises within the HGSA [Code of Ethics](#) and [Scope of Practice](#) for Genetic Counsellors at the level of a competent practitioner (HGSA [Competency Standards for Genetic Counsellors](#)), can be given by the following referees:

- The most appropriate Referee's report is from a line manager or head of department who has at least two years post FHGSA (Genetic Counselling) certification and whose registration is current.

- **Alternatively, if the line manager or head of department does not hold current FHGSA certification,** two referee's reports should be provided, one from the line manager or head of department AND an additional report from an appropriate senior genetic counsellor colleague with at least two years post FHGSA certification whose registration is current. To avoid conflict of interest the referee should not in any way report to or be managed by the applicant and the report should state the nature of their professional relationship.
- **In the absence of an appropriate referee with current FHGSA genetic counselling certification,** the [Professional Practice Committee](#) may consider at least two referee's reports, at least one from a genetic counselling supervisor meeting the supervisor requirements as per the [HGSA Supervision Policy for Genetic Counsellors](#). A current CV will be required for any referee who is not FHGSA in order to assess their suitability.

6.3.2. Genetic counsellors in other Areas of Practice

Individuals working in other areas of genetic counselling practice must maintain and be able to provide:

- Written evidence of employment such as a record of employment or employment contract.
 - Alternatively, if written evidence is not available, a Referee's report (below) can include details of hours worked.
- A formal job description from their employer.
- Evidence of supervision, as outlined in the [HGSA Supervision Policy for Genetic Counsellors](#). Supervision is a requirement for all practising genetic counsellors.
- The Committee may require, at their discretion:
 - A statement highlighting how practice in their current employment meets the [Scope of Practice](#) and [Competency Standards for Genetic Counsellors](#) on a regular basis.
 - A reference from a senior genetic counsellor who is familiar with the practitioner's work and area of practice, who has at least two years post FHGSA (Genetic Counselling) certification and whose registration is current.
 - **In the absence of an appropriate referee with current genetic counselling certification,** the [Professional Practice Committee](#) may consider other appropriately qualified referees from the practitioner's area of practice. A current CV will be required for any referee who is not FHGSA in order to assess their suitability.

6.4. Practice Audit

Any genetic counsellor listed on the [HGSA Register of Genetic Counsellors](#) may be subject to audit. On request, practitioners must be able to provide evidence to validate claims of 'practice' (see 6.3 Evidence of Practice, page 6). An audit of at least five per cent of ACTIVE and REGISTERED genetic counsellors will be conducted by the [Professional Practice Committee](#) on an annual basis to ensure compliance with the Policy and address any situations where REGISTERED practitioners cannot demonstrate the required minimum hours to be considered practising. All practitioners with PROVISIONAL status will be audited on an annual basis. Practitioners who do not meet the requirements and/or fail to respond to the Audit may have their status on the Register changed to LAPSED.

7. Resumption of Practice

7.1. Lapsed Registration

Genetic counsellors not working in clinical practice may still maintain ACTIVE status on the Register if they meet the minimum CPD and practice requirements (see 2. NASRHP Definition of ‘practice’ on page 3). Practitioners who do not submit mandatory declarations and/or who do not meet the recency of practice minimum requirement will no longer be considered registered practitioners. Their registration will become LAPSED, and they will not be entitled to use MHGSA or FHGSA titles, or act as a supervisor for the purposes of genetic counselling training, certification, or resumption of practice.

The maximum timeframe allowed for being LAPSED is three years. Within these three years, FHGSA genetic counsellors can apply to undertake Resumption of Practice (see below). If an application to undertake Resumption of Practice is not made within those three years, the practitioner’s Registration will become EXPIRED. In order to recertify, these practitioners will need to re-apply to the [Professional Practice Committee](#) for MHGSA status and to the [Certification Committee](#) to undertake FHGSA clinical certification.

7.1.1. Exclusions

MHGSA genetic counsellors undertaking certification are not eligible to undertake a Resumption of Practice Program through the [Professional Practice Committee](#). They are required to notify the [Certification Committee](#) of changes to their circumstances (such as extended periods of leave) that may impact on their ability to meet the practice and other requirements of the genetic counselling certification process to develop a plan that will enable them to continue and complete the certification process.

7.2. Applying for Resumption of Practice

Where a practitioner does not meet recency of practice requirements and becomes LAPSED, they must submit an application and a proposed resumption of practice plan to the [Professional Practice Committee](#). Resumption of Practice applications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and Resumption of Practice plans will account for previous area/s of practice, the type of practice they are returning to, and the length of time they have been away from genetic counselling.

An application for Resumption of Practice will include:

- Demonstration of work in a role that will provide equivalent to at least 200 hours per year of genetic counselling practice.
- Genetic counsellors returning to clinical practice will need to demonstrate that their role includes direct clinical contact of at least 125 clinical contact hours over 3 years.
- A proposed CPD program, including:
 - a log of any CPD activities undertaken since last registration, as described in the CPD standard.
 - A detailed outline of proposed CPD activity during the first 12 months of returning to practice.
 - The proposed CPD activity must meet or exceed the annual requirements outlined in the [CPD Policy](#) and should include both knowledge and skill-based activities directly related to the area of practice that the candidate is returning to.

- Additional CPD activity may be required to meet the Competency Standards and may be requested at the discretion of the [Professional Practice Committee](#).
- A summary of how this plan will assist to re-establish their skill and knowledge base in line with the [Competency Standards](#), with a particular focus on the first three months of return to practice.
- Supervised mentoring of practice from commencement of active practice. Applicants must:
 - Nominate a genetic counselling supervisor, undertake supervision, and provide a [Supervisor Report Form](#) with each submission meeting the requirements of the HGSA [Supervision Policy for Genetic Counsellors](#).
 - Additional or more frequent supervision or supervisors' reports may be required at the discretion of the [Professional Practice Committee](#).

A practitioner undertaking an approved Resumption of Practice plan will be granted PROVISIONAL status on the register of genetic counsellors on the HSGA website. They will be required to maintain HGSA membership and Registration with the HGSA throughout the process unless the Board has granted exemption for exceptional circumstances. They will be subject to annual mandatory declarations and annual practice audit by the [Professional Practice Committee](#). They will also be subject to annual CPD audit by the [Continuing Professional Development Committee](#).

7.3. Re-registration

REGISTERED status will only be granted once all requirements of the Resumption of Practice Plan are fulfilled and have been submitted to and approved by the [Professional Practice Committee](#), including a CPD log and supervisors' reports.

If the practitioner's registration has LAPSED and they do not commence a Resumption of Practice plan within three years, their Registration will become EXPIRED. In order to re-register, these practitioners will need to re-apply for MHGSA status and re-commence the Certification process.

8. Exclusions

According to NASRHP², continuing professional development (CPD) does not constitute practice, and it is addressed separately in the HGSA [Continuing Professional Development \(CPD\) for Genetic Counsellors Policy](#).

9. Mandatory declaration

Registered practitioners must complete a mandatory declaration at the time of annual registration, including that they have met the recency of practice requirements. Practitioners must maintain evidence of practice meeting the above requirements, which may be requested in the case of an audit (see 6.4 Practice Audit, page 7).

² NASRHP; *Self Regulating Health Profession Peak Bodies Membership Standards*; 2/12/2016

10. Figure: Regulation Flowchart

