

Core Competencies for Psychedelic Therapy:

Advancing Training Standardization, Quality Implementation, and Professional Development for the Behavioral Health Workforce

Project Overview: To support training consistency, quality implementation, and professional development, BrainFutures will convene an interdisciplinary workgroup to identify core competencies for psychedelic therapy. Core competencies define *what practitioners must know and be able to do*. They are foundational to work within both academic and clinical settings, making their development both timely and important. The project is and will continue to be deeply informed by the input of key stakeholders, including national provider associations, clinicians, training providers, researchers, consumer advocates and other representatives for patient voice.

Interprofessional Approach: BrainFutures plans for the workgroup to take an interprofessional approach to the project, identifying core competencies that apply to an interdisciplinary team of professionals as opposed to a single practitioner-type within the team. This approach is consistent with other core competencies applicable to a specific modality of care; it also acknowledges that differences between roles are already covered by core competencies developed specifically for each profession. Core competencies for foundational education for referring providers not directly involved in care delivery will also be identified.

As a result, the core competencies will apply to most providers involved in psychedelic therapy, but each competency may not be applicable to every provider. In addition, the workgroup will assume prior knowledge and skills typically reflected within the traditional curricula of a practitioner's home discipline.

Core Competencies Definition: Core competencies define *what practitioners must know and be able to do*. The National Academy of Medicine defines core competencies as the “identified knowledge, ability, or expertise in a specific subject area or skill set.”¹ The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) uses a similar definition, “a set of related knowledge, skills, and abilities required to successfully perform

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK221516/>

critical work functions or tasks in a defined work setting.”² Notably, as discussed below, while core competencies are foundational to the development of curricula, training standards, certification, and licensure, they are distinct from each of these categories.

Timeliness: Stakeholders in the psychedelic community express optimism about potential regulatory approval in the near term, opening the door to broad access for patients who may benefit from these new treatments. Such a timeline requires that work on core competencies begin as soon as possible. Approval by FDA will demand a skilled, established workforce prepared to deliver safe, effective psychedelic care. Today, while a meaningful psychedelic learning infrastructure exists within academic settings and stand-alone organizations, its organic growth has led to inconsistency in curricula and training. There is broad agreement that practitioners need a shared lexicon and shared principles upon which to build an educational architecture and workforce framework. Core competencies build that shared vision: foundational knowledge, skills, and abilities required to ensure the safe and effective delivery of psychedelic therapy.

Applicability and Audience: Core competencies have wide applicability in both academic and clinical settings. In academic settings, core competencies are foundational to developing curricula (i.e. instructional design and assessment), training standards (e.g. hours, supervision, and settings), and certification criteria (which verify mastery of core competencies), and may even support licensure (i.e. legal authority to practice). In clinical settings, core competencies can be used to identify workforce needs including drafting job descriptions, to define employee success including performance reviews, to build a mentoring framework, and to engage in guideline development.

This broad applicability means that core competencies for psychedelic therapy have a wide audience, including clinical practitioners, curriculum developers, training program sponsors, standards developers, and funders. The current legislative and regulatory environment may also generate interest from policymakers and regulators.

Psychedelic Therapy Definition: BrainFutures plans to define “psychedelic therapy” or “psychedelic treatment” as a non-uniform modality of care rather than focusing on any individual treatment protocol or pathway. Following an example set by SAMHSA, the workgroup will identify a competency set that specifies “skills such as the use of evidence-based treatments and tools, but generally not identify specific treatments or tools.” In this way, BrainFutures acknowledges the role of a psychedelic substance as part of a psychiatric intervention but does not specify a methodology. BrainFutures anticipates that

² <https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep20-03-08-001.pdf>

this approach allows the competencies to co-exist with changes in evidence, treatment approaches, settings, and populations.

Partnership: Over the past several months, BrainFutures has collected feedback on its proposed approach via key informant interviews with academic experts, manufacturers, clinicians, national associations, government partners, and others. The purpose of these meetings was two-fold: one, to benefit from the wide expertise of the mental health community in designing the core competencies project; and two, to build a team of meaningful collaborators.

Core competencies are a piece of shared infrastructure. While the competencies' quality must be irrefutable, their true value will be measured exclusively in the robustness of their use and the trust of their readers. The project is therefore meaningless without a concurrent effort to welcome collaborators into the process, ensuring that they are invested in the final product. BrainFutures will continue this partnership work through workgroup formation, draft review, feedback opportunities, and regular outreach throughout the project period.

Process: Following the conclusion of key informant interviews, as well as any necessary refinement of the project plan, BrainFutures will conduct a comprehensive review of available literature, including but not limited to: clinical trial protocols, training manuals, university curricula, professional practice guidelines, academic papers, and relevant core competency sets. BrainFutures will concurrently invite seven to nine experts to begin participation in the core competency workgroup, during which members will deliberate over, and vote on, a set of competencies over a period of roughly six months. Following the meetings, BrainFutures will draft a full core competency document, as well as a concise "Statement of Policy" and seek endorsements from relevant partners.