



Spiritual Health
Association



Spiritual Care Australia

Proposed Certification Process for Victorian Spiritual Care Practitioners in Health

Frequently Asked Questions

**Spiritual Care Australia and Spiritual Health Association
(The Partner Agencies)**

BACKGROUND

'Eligibility for Spiritual Care Australia membership' has been the standard for spiritual care practitioners in health for some years. However, there is a growing perception among health care providers and others that these requirements should be clarified and strengthened, along with provision of clearer educational pathways.

Spiritual Care Australia and Spiritual Health Association (formerly Spiritual Health Victoria) have begun a process of research and consultation. As a first step, a literature review and a mapping exercise of requirements in other allied health professions was undertaken¹. We then sent out an email invitation to key stakeholders in spiritual care, inviting feedback via email and Survey Monkey on a proposed process and proposed requirements for certification of spiritual care practitioners in Victorian healthcare settings. We'd like to express our gratitude to the contributors who offered feedback.

Many of the comments included questions about the details of the process. As the project is in development, there are many aspects that we cannot confirm as yet. Where we are clear on a process, we have included a note below.

All ongoing development work for the certification process will be undertaken in consultation with the sector.

Michelle Morgan (Project Worker), Harriet Ziegler (SCA), and Cheryl Holmes (Spiritual Health).

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CONTACT

Cheryl Holmes, 0409 186 474, ceo@spiritualhealth.org.au
Spiritual Health Association: <http://spiritualhealth.org.au/>

Harriet Ziegler, 0433 152 994, eo@spiritualcareaustralia.org.au
Spiritual Care Australia: <https://www.spiritualcareaustralia.org.au/>

¹ Morgan, Holmes and Ziegler (2019). *Certification for spiritual care practitioners in health. Literature review and mapping*. Spiritual Health Association and Spiritual Care Australia. Available online: <http://spiritualhealth.org.au/>

1. What is the process for certification?

- Is this for current or new practitioners?
- How will applicants access the application process?
- How will applicants be notified of the result?
- What modelling is being done of likely success rates of current practitioners and ability of them or their organisations to transition them to accreditation?
- What are the downsides if someone chooses not to be a member?
- Who has access to the spiritual care practitioner register?
- What would the register be used for?

Spiritual care practitioners will apply for certification via an online process which will include an online knowledge test and reflective practice scenarios.

The process for certification is still in development. The expert advisory committees appointed by *The Partner Agencies* will continue to work on the details over the coming year, including a pilot in Victoria to refine the work.

2. What are the costs associated with the process of certification?

- To applicants?
- To the association (will assessors and committee members be paid)?
- Regarding the knowledge test and scenarios?
- Relating to CPD?
- Relating to appeals process?
- Is the cost/accessibility issues of developmental needs being considered in design of this process?

At this stage, the costs associated with the process of certification are unknown. There will be some costs involved in setting up and maintaining the process, however it is unclear at this stage who will be responsible for different costs.

For example, in allied health disciplines, professional development may be covered by individuals or their employers. Applications for registration in the USA incur a cost to the applicant.

The current SCA costs for Certified membership are:

- Certified \$270
- Certified Advanced \$270

The costs associated with the revised certification process are yet to be decided.

3. Who will be on the certification/ assessor board/committees?

- Who will be on the certification board/committees and assessor board?
- Which body will oversee the process?
- How long is their term?
- Will they be paid?
- Will they be known to applicants?
- What is the criteria or competency for an 'independent board of assessors'?
- Who would be available to provide an independent review?

- Committee/board should have at least one member of the applicant's faith tradition reviewing results

Initially, expert advisory committees will be appointed by *The Partner Agencies* with the tasks of developing the knowledge test and reflective practice scenarios, and refining the certification process. Members of these expert advisory committees will be drawn from educational and spiritual care backgrounds.

The Partner Agencies will then oversee the formation of additional groups – one to respond to the online knowledge test and reflective practice scenarios, and another to manage the applications process, including appeals processes.

At this stage, it is unknown how long board member's terms will be, or whether they will be paid. *The Partner Agencies* will develop a list of criteria for members of each group.

4. What are the qualification requirements for spiritual care certification?

- What level of tertiary qualification is required and why?
- There are few spiritual care degrees. How do people access appropriate training?
- What defines 'related discipline'?
- How many CPE units are required?
- What if the person can't access CPE? What equivalent qualifications are available?

In line with other allied health disciplines, a bachelor degree in a humanities or health discipline is a requirement for entry level practitioners. Advanced practitioners will hold post graduate qualifications relevant to spiritual care provision and leadership.

Both entry level and advanced practitioners will hold two units of CPE or equivalent number of hours of supervision in clinical spiritual care practice. An advanced CPE unit (or equivalent) is preferred for advanced practitioners.

SCA envisions that – in disciplines other than health – it may be preferable to add another 'provisional' level for people entering the profession and working toward their bachelor degree.

5. What will the online knowledge test and reflective practice scenarios look like?

- Can we see a sample knowledge test?
- What sort of knowledge would be tested?
- What would it take for a 'pass' to be achieved? What pass rate... 65%, 75%, 90%?
- What if someone fails?
- How will they be assessed?
- What is the value of this kind of test?
- Doesn't this double up on what's covered in CPE?
- How long would the test take? What is the timeframe for feedback?
- In what form/format will feedback be offered and in how much detail?
- Feedback by whom?
- How will this be communicated and with what support?
- Preference for education providers to cover this territory

- Concern about cheating
- Care would be needed to ensure panel members are qualified to design/assess tests, that they do not have a relationship with the applicant, and that they have not allowed personal bias to influence their assessment. Running these kinds of tests is the role of qualified trainers and teachers.
- Some people may 'sound appropriate' in written form and have knowledge but not be as fitting in person. Where is the space for that and could a video interview/component be incorporated?
- Some people have good 'knowledge' but poor practice. Conversely, someone may be an excellent practitioner but perform poorly in test conditions. How does an online test assess that?
- I have a fairly major concern about the adequacy of online responses as a criterion for assessing suitability for the kinds of deeply relational forms of ministry that spiritual care entails.
- Can't we have an in-person assessment by team of assessors?

The online knowledge test and reflective practice scenarios will be developed by an advisory committee with expertise in education and spiritual care. The online test will be multiple choice and will be based upon the SCA Standards of Practice and Spiritual Health Association's Capabilities Framework. The SCA standards include:

1. Delivery of care
2. Assessment
3. Teamwork and collaboration
4. Accountability
5. Ethical practice
6. Respect for diversity
7. Supervision
8. Self care
9. Continuous quality improvement
10. Knowledge and continuing education

Applicants will be given single-use access to the online test. The pass rate for entry level and advanced practitioners will be determined during the trial phase. Applicants will receive their test score immediately upon completion.

[A similar test is currently being utilised by Spiritual Care Association in the USA. It has 100 multiple choice questions and applicants are allowed two hours to complete the test. Given the limited time-frame, it would be difficult for applicants to refer to texts during the test period, limiting cheating. Applicants receive a score upon completing. A preparatory course is available to applicants, along with a bibliography of articles referenced.]

The reflective practice scenarios will be in response to a short video showing a spiritual care encounter. Applicants will be asked to provide a reflective critique of the encounter. This will be followed by written documentation in simulated 'patient notes'.

The test and practice scenario measure the person's knowledge, reflective capacity and competency in documenting in the medical record. In addition to spiritual care certification undertaken by the professional association, it is understood that employers undertake their own credentialing during the employment process which includes in-person interviews.

6. What is required for CPD and supervision?

- How do we certify attendance or quality of professional development?
- What constitutes CPD?
- Will there be a list of approved CPD?
- Concerns around who provides CPD as some minor faith traditions cannot and availability of CPD when many spiritual carers work part-time and cannot get time off for it.
- What about people who work part time?
- What about the cost of CPD?
- Are supervisors accredited? What are their qualifications?
- Is supervision in group or one:one format?

CPD hours will be pro rata for spiritual care practitioners who work part time. CPD will include a range of activities, for example: self-directed learning, formal education, workshops, seminars, writing for publication, conducting research. SCA will have an online CPD log where practitioners can keep track of their hours.

Further details will be clarified by *The Partner Agencies* over the coming year.

7. What if someone's application is rejected?

- What is the appeals process?
- Time frames? For how long, how soon before they can resubmit?
- If applicant passed test &/or practice scenarios do they need to re-sit passed elements?
- What is the time frame for this and would there be facility for the applicant to ring and discuss way forward?
- How many times would this be allowed? Would you think about a time in between, i.e. "You were unsuccessful this year, but you're free to apply again next year"
- What is our liability? What is our authority?
- Will there be a time limit before a new submission can be made?
- How much engagement will be offered to the applicant if their application is denied?
- Is there a register of denials?
- What are pathways for further opportunity to apply?
- What protections are in place for the organisation if someone gets nasty and takes your decision to an external body for review?

The details for an appeals process will be developed by the expert advisory committees over the coming year.