FACT-MB LeHealth Professions Advisory Council

hpac@gov.mb.ca.

RE: The Regulation of Counselling Therapists in Manitoba.

Thank you for inviting members of the public to provide input to the government’s proposal to regulate Counselling Therapists in Manitoba.

**I am a (member of the public) (Counselling Therapist) (Association). If a Counselling Therapist write a brief description of your practice. i.e. I have been a Counselling Therapist for the past x years and treat adults/children/seniors etc.**

I fully support the regulation of Counselling Therapists in Manitoba. Regulation will increase access and provide basic safety for those receiving mental health counselling. This has never been more urgently needed.

Without regulation, recipients of mental health services in Manitoba do not have basic safety protections. A College of Counselling Therapists will provide basic safety for recipients of mental health counselling by ensuring there are standards and oversight. Children, youth and adults suffering from mental health issues are a particularly vulnerable population. Regulating the profession will demonstrate this Government’s commitment to helping Manitobans recover from an unprecedented mental health crisis, and provide basic ongoing protections for those who are vulnerable.

Certification through voluntary professional association membership is not enough to ensure safety. Associations cannot require mental health counsellors to be held to Manitoba's minimum healthcare standards, including: protecting patients from sexual abuse or misconduct; standards for competence and ethics; a clear avenue for the public to file complaints with a transparent discipline process; and a public register to verify counsellors offering services to the public. Without regulation, mental health counsellors who have breached safety and conduct standards may continue to work with vulnerable populations with very little way (if any) for the public to know that they have prior misconduct issues. This is especially troubling in the context of sexual abuse and misconduct.

Regulation will increase mental health service access and capacity. In other jurisdictions where counselling has become regulated, third party insurance companies began to cover counselling services. Employers and agencies will have a much larger pool of regulated professionals to draw upon when filling urgently needed mental health counselling roles.

Six provinces now have legislation that regulates this profession. Other provinces are actively pursuing regulation. The profession is also regulated in all 50 US states, making Manitoba one of only a handful of jurisdictions in North America without these basic protections in place for the public. Manitobans are exposed to the additional risk of unqualified practitioners coming to Manitoba where there are no basic safety standards in place and they can practice without proper accountability.

The capacity for our province to recover and develop resilience coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, and deal with the harsh realities of the opioid crisis, will largely depend on our collective mental well-being. Those with pre-existing mental health conditions are particularly vulnerable.

I fully support the regulation of this profession and hope that the government will act quickly on this matter.

Sincerely,

{name}

{email}