

EDITORIALS

Editorial: Federal Spotlight on Counselling and Psychotherapy a Welcome Boost

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Two Australian Government-commissioned reports look set to elevate the counselling and psychotherapy professions in Australia. At this watershed moment, the nation's leading research journal for these professions is experiencing a surge in high-quality submissions, reaffirming its role as a platform for original, evidence-informed contributions shaping theory, policy, and practice. Volume 13(2) of the *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia* (PACJA) contains the most distinctive and diverse set of research topics ever published in the journal. From adult clergy sexual exploitation to songlines; the impacts of self-compassion on women with ADHD to climate anxiety; and voluntary assisted dying to the relevance of Carl Rogers' "person of tomorrow", the broad range of articles will appeal to an equally broad range of counsellors, psychotherapists, and Indigenous healing practitioners.

Two recently released reports commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing are likely to lead to the elevation of the counselling and psychotherapy professions in Australia. The *National Standards for Counsellors and Psychotherapists—Summary Report* (Allen + Clarke Consulting, 2025) was published in October 2025. The Standards outline what is expected of professional counsellors and psychotherapists in relation to education and training, professional practice, ethics, competency, diversity and inclusion, and quality assurance. Developed in consultation with the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia (PACFA) and largely aligning with PACFA's existing registration and accreditation standards, the report should give PACFA registrants confidence in the Standards and the Government's commitment to the future standing of counsellors and psychotherapists. As the Minister for Health, Disability and Ageing, Mark Butler, stated in a letter to PACFA,

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The development of the National Standards marks a significant milestone in formally recognising counsellors and psychotherapists as an essential part of Australia's health and mental health workforce ... this reform will help address barriers to workforce utilisation and improve access to early intervention and recovery support for people experiencing distress. (Butler, 2025, para. 4)

Barriers to workforce utilisation included reservations about the current self-regulatory approach for counsellors and psychotherapists, and inconsistencies in the academic and experiential requirements for registration, alongside potential impacts on the safe delivery of mental health services. These were noted by the 2021 House of Representatives Select Committee's Inquiry into Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, which prompted the Australian Government in May 2023 to allocate \$300,000 to develop National Standards for counsellors and psychotherapists. According to PACFA's Chief Executive Officer Johanna de Wever,

This is the first time the Government has committed any significant amount of money to this particular workforce so it shows a real intent. It has been a consultative and respectful process towards a situation in which counsellors and psychotherapists are better utilised by the Australian public and consequently also receive better remuneration and better recognition.

Implementation of the Standards is expected to take three to five years.

Another report, *Transforming Health Professionals Regulation in Australia: Independent Review Final Report* (Dawson, 2025), was released in September 2025 after two years of research and the production of two consultation papers. This report calls for the creation of a professions registration model that would incorporate the existing membership model. Practitioners would still be registered with their membership body, but the membership body would be overseen, audited, and accredited by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Perks of that model could include title protection, Medicare funding, government employment, GST exemption, and inclusion in the National Health Workforce Dataset, which is used to develop policy. This framework appears to offer great benefit to professions such as counselling and psychotherapy where clinical risk does not justify inclusion in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health practitioners, but exclusion has been a significant disadvantage. PACFA will eagerly await more information about the Government's appetite to implement this model in coming years.

At this watershed moment for counselling and psychotherapy in Australia, the nation's leading research journal for these professions is experiencing a surge in high-quality submissions, reaffirming its role as a platform for

original, evidence-informed contributions shaping theory, policy, and practice, and demonstrating the importance of the work undertaken by counsellors and psychotherapists. Volume 13(2) of the *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia* (PACJA) contains arguably the most distinctive and diverse set of research topics ever published in the journal. From adult clergy sexual exploitation to songlines; the impacts of self-compassion on women with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) to climate anxiety; and voluntary assisted dying to the relevance of Carl Rogers' "person of tomorrow", the broad range of articles is likely to appeal to an equally broad range of counsellors, psychotherapists, and Indigenous healing practitioners.

A scoping review (Coates et al., 2025) found that stress, trauma, and mental illness are generally associated with reduced awareness and interpretation of bodily signals. Underscoring the value of trauma-informed and somatic therapeutic approaches, the review suggests that interpersonal trauma may be associated with clients' avoidance of bodily awareness, potentially as a protective strategy. Trauma-informed practices are also recommended in "The Scars are Written on my Soul: The Impacts of Adult Clergy Sexual Exploitation" (Simpson, 2025). Here, the need for practitioners to understand the unique patterns of coercive compliance, entrapment, and systemic harm in the sexual abuse of adult congregation members by clergy is emphasised. The article reconceptualises sexual exploitation as a form of gender-based violence.

This issue's Viewpoint (Everingham, 2025) examines our existence in an increasingly unstable and uncertain world, drawing on Carl Rogers' speculations on "tomorrow's person". Rogers (1980) envisioned a grounded yet hopeful world in which humans (including counsellors and psychotherapists) adapt socially and psychologically to meet the demands of accelerated change and crises. Continuing this theme is a book review of *Climate, Psychology, and Change: Reimagining Psychotherapy in an Era of Global Disruption and Climate Anxiety* (Bednarek, 2024). Reviewer Maria Monastiriotis (2025) writes that the collection of essays is a cry for hope urging practitioners to respond to climate change and the anxiety it evokes. A Practice Reflection titled "Dwelling With Anxiety: A Heideggerian Case Study in Existential Therapy" (Segal, 2025) shows how hermeneutic-existential-phenomenological therapy can help clients shift from trying to control anxiety to staying-with it. The article "offers therapists an alternative lens for engaging with anxiety—not as pathology but as a mooded disclosure of being" (para. 1), providing soft moments of hope.

Hope is central to a new integrative psychotherapy approach developed by Denis O'Hara (2025). Hope-focused therapy maintains that hope—one of the common factors of change—is essential to therapy and serves as a barometer of therapeutic change. Movingly, O'Hara states that therapists must "attend to the presence of hope, to hold hope when the client cannot, to challenge false hope when it confuses, and to nurture hope until the

client holds it for themselves” (para. 45). Another innovative framework is proposed by Dudfield and Finlay (2025) in an “Exploratory Review of Spiritual Care in the Voluntary Assisted Dying Environment: Towards a Holistic Theoretical Framework”. Drawing on relevant literature, the authors argue that practitioners must support clients in the voluntary assisted dying context by addressing internal spiritual concerns, and family and community relationships.

A relational view of memory is explored in “Contributions From Aboriginal Australian Psychology: Songlines, Memory, and Relational Knowledge Systems” (Tempone-Wiltshire & Yunkaporta, 2025). Contending that memory is not stored solely in the brain but in ongoing relationship with land, the authors explain how Indigenous memory practices give rise to songlines connecting people, place, and understanding. Another article that focuses on the embodied nature of communication is “Communicative Musicality and Its Relevance to Psychotherapy and Counselling” (Green & Collens, 2025). It suggests that practitioners should listen to the musicality and rhythm of therapeutic dialogue to deepen their attunement to the client and support relational repair.

Pivoting from these theoretical musings, a quantitative research study of 89 women diagnosed with ADHD in adulthood found that low self-related mentalisation is associated with a high psychosocial impact of ADHD (Witteveen & O’Hara, 2025). Offering promising directions for targeted therapeutic interventions, self-compassion was found to be a protective factor in women with ADHD. The investigation used a brief, freely available measure of the impact of ADHD on psychosocial functioning developed in phase 1 of the study, which incorporated 388 women participants.

A book review of *Navigating Family Estrangement: Helping Adults Understand and Manage the Challenges of Family Estrangement* (Melvin, 2024) echoes the trauma-informed stance of other articles and client-centred therapeutic approaches prevailing in Australia today. Reviewer Kat O’Mara (2025) introduces Melvin’s non-pathologising estrangement inquiry model, which centres the client’s autonomy and agency and suggests that sometimes estrangement is an acceptable outcome.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we have enjoyed compiling it. I would like to express my gratitude to PACFA, the PACFA research committee, the PACJA editorial board, authors, peer reviewers, copy editors including Rachel Wheeler, and Scholastica staff, without whom this issue would not have been possible.

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