



Certified Practicing Nutritionist – Mental Health Role Statement

– drawn from the CPN competency mapping to the Queensland Alliance for Mental Health Core Competency Framework

Certified Practicing Nutritionists (CPNs) are qualified health professionals trained in Clinical Nutrition. Their practice is person-led, trauma-informed, culturally responsive, and grounded in the bio-psycho-social model of care. CPNs can provide targeted, evidence-informed nutrition care to support individuals across the spectrum of mental health and wellbeing.

1. Effective Communication

CPNs are trained in person-centred communication techniques that build trust, respect, and empathy. They actively use inclusive, non-stigmatising and strengths-based language, listen attentively, and respond sensitively to a person's cultural, cognitive, and linguistic needs. They adapt both verbal and non-verbal communication appropriately and engage interpreter services when needed.

Written and digital communications are timely, respectful, and wherever possible and appropriate, they are co-produced with clients. CPNs also apply motivational interviewing techniques, support shared decision-making, and advocate for clients to use their own voice in care planning and review. They maintain professional integrity and clear role boundaries and document care plans in language that clients and practitioners can both understand.

2. Understanding Mental Health and Wellbeing

CPNs understand that mental health is shaped by the interaction between biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors. They apply the Wellbeing Continuum alongside clinical understanding of mental health conditions and diagnostic frameworks. They take account of stigma, distress, and sociocultural barriers in a non-pathologising way, respecting diverse definitions of mental wellbeing.

CPNs are aware of the systemic functions of the mental health and community sector and will refer clients into appropriate care pathways where the full spectrum of the client's needs extends beyond their scope of practice. CPN nutritional assessments and treatment planning include culturally safe practices, recognition of intersectionality, and integration with physical health status and chronic disease comorbidities.

3. Trauma-Informed Practice

CPNs understand the pervasive impact of trauma on health and wellbeing. They approach all interactions with respect for physical, emotional, and cultural safety. They build therapeutic trust through choice, transparency, and shared control, while being mindful of the need to prevent re-traumatisation.

In responding to challenging behaviour or distress, CPNs use established de-escalation and motivational techniques. They maintain professional boundaries and refer when specialist mental health care is needed. Their training enables them to nurture and contribute to trauma-informed environments that reinforce client dignity, resilience, and personal agency.

4. Supporting Personal Recovery

CPNs work alongside clients as equal partners, using recovery-oriented and culturally attuned models of care. They support individuals to define meaningful goals, self-manage their health, and move toward flourishing. With counselling and coaching competencies, they tailor nutritional care to each person's strengths, preferences, and readiness for change.

CPNs use structured clinical assessment frameworks within a nutrition as medicine paradigm and support dietary and lifestyle change through feedback-informed, evidence-based interventions. Client progress is reviewed regularly, and the treatment plan is renegotiated where necessary to promote optimal outcomes for the client.

5. Responding to Crisis and Suicidality

CPNs understand that individuals may experience acute distress, suicidal ideation, or crisis events as part of their mental health journey. CPNs adopt a trauma-informed, calm, and ethical approach in responding to such situations. They are trained to recognise early signs of crisis and respond within the scope of their role to ensure client safety, including making timely referrals to mental health services where indicated.

CPNs understand the importance of balancing safety, dignity, and risk. Within a nutrition as medicine context, they support the development of personalised coping strategies and as far as possible and appropriate, align responses with the person's expressed preferences.

Following any critical incident, CPNs participate in debriefing and reflective processes to support their own wellbeing. They also maintain professional integrity, operate within legal boundaries and follow mandatory reporting and workplace protocols. In all cases, they uphold confidentiality while acting in accordance with ethical duty of care to their client.

6. Social Determinants of Mental Health

CPNs consider the broader social, cultural, and structural conditions that shape mental health outcomes. During assessment and care planning, they consider factors such as housing instability, financial stress, education, social exclusion, stigma, intergenerational trauma, and

systemic discrimination. They work collaboratively with the client to identify barriers and connect them through referral, with relevant services and supports.

CPNs are trained to recognise the intersectionality between socioeconomic conditions, health inequities, and recovery. They identify when social determinants are impacting engagement or outcomes in the nutrition care plan and refer to or collaborate with appropriate services and community supports. When appropriate, they support the development of advocacy skills and through referral, connect clients to pathways that can increase agency and inclusion.

CPNs incorporate culturally appropriate, lifestyle-sensitive nutrition strategies that align with the client's life circumstances. In every case, they ensure that social determinants are acknowledged and accommodated, as part of the comprehensive, person-centred nutritional care plan.

7. Multi-Morbidity

CPNs are trained to work at the nutritional interface between physical and mental health. They understand that clients with mental health conditions are at increased risk of metabolic syndromes, cardiovascular disease, nutritional deficiencies, and the side effects of psychotropic medications, including weight gain and insulin resistance.

CPNs use clinical assessment techniques to identify comorbid conditions, analyse diagnostic data, and apply nutrition and lifestyle interventions that support both physical and mental wellbeing. They educate clients about the impacts of alcohol and other drugs on nutrition and mental health and provide relevant referrals when indicated.

CPNs also support clients with disabilities, chronic illness, and cognitive differences by adjusting interventions to ensure accessibility, equity, and dignity. In all cases, they work within the scope of their practice, applying clinical and nutritional knowledge to improve outcomes across co-existing health conditions.

8. Collaboration, Coordination, and Connection

CPNs are active and capable participants in interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration. They maintain knowledge of local health, welfare, and community services and use this to ensure appropriate use of referrals to coordinated care pathways. They develop both formal and informal networks to support continuity of client care.

CPNs can participate in case conferencing, shared learning activities, and collaborative care planning across sectors. They also take initiative in developing their own professional capability and contributing to service improvement through mentoring and review.

When making referrals, CPNs ensure that these are undertaken respectfully, with client consent, and in line with privacy and confidentiality legislation. They write clear, professional referral documents and recommendations within their area of expertise.

9. Working with Families, Supporters, and Kin

CPNs recognise the vital role families, carers, and kin play in supporting recovery. With the individual's informed consent, CPNs can involve families and supporters as appropriate, acknowledging them as part of the person's care network. They are sensitive to family dynamics, diverse caregiving structures, and cultural approaches to care, and they work across both individualistic and collective cultures in their delivery of nutritional care.

CPNs communicate with families using inclusive, non-judgemental, and respectful language, and seek interpreters when required to support understanding. They promote shared understanding, encourage collaborative care planning, and recognise the stressors that carers may face - and can provide information or referral to specialised carer supports when appropriate.

CPNs maintain professional boundaries and uphold the confidentiality and autonomy of the person they are nutritionally supporting, ensuring family involvement is always person-led and rights-based.

10. Evidence-Based Practice and Continuous Improvement

CPNs are committed to delivering evidence-informed care and engaging in continuous improvement. They integrate contemporary research and clinical evidence into their nutritional interventions and routinely evaluate outcomes to improve practice. CPNs critically review literature, apply findings to individualised nutritional treatment plans, and assess their relevance and application within the mental health context.

CPNs actively participate in reflective practice, peer review, and professional supervision/mentoring to ensure they remain responsive to the evolving nutrition needs in the mental health sector. They undertake formal and informal development activities, including ongoing education and membership with professional associations, and routinely review their practice against ethical, clinical, and legal standards. They also contribute to the development of knowledge within their profession through shared learning and engagement with emerging best practices.

11. Safety, Professionalism, and Ethical Practice

CPNs adhere to professional standards for ethical and safe practice. They uphold client confidentiality, informed consent, and respect the rights of their clients to be autonomous. They understand mandatory reporting requirements and follow incident reporting protocols in line with workplace procedures.

CPNs maintain safe and professional boundaries, operate within their defined scope of practice, and make timely referrals when client needs fall outside their expertise.

CPNs also prioritise practitioner wellbeing by identifying signs of stress, burnout, and vicarious trauma, and engage in regular self-care and debriefing practices. They promote ethical decision-making and regularly review their own practice to ensure accountability and alignment with professional values.

12. Wellbeing Promotion and Population-Based Approaches

CPNs are equipped to contribute significantly to mental health promotion at the population level. They can design and deliver nutritional plans/programs that enhance protective factors such as diet and physical health, and address food insecurity and health inequity. They can lead or collaborate on public health nutrition initiatives that improve community mental wellbeing.

CPNs can support community engagement, tailoring interventions to meet the needs of specific population groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culturally and linguistically diverse populations, and those with lived experience of mental health distress. They empower individuals and groups through personalised nutrition education and nutritional skill-building.