

# Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada



**Registered Community Support Specialist (RCSS)**

**Application Guide**

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**Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRA Canada)**

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## Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRA Canada)

The Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRA Canada) is a national association representing members across Canada who provide a continuum of rehabilitation services. Members are from a diversity of disciplines and are employed in a variety of settings. Members working as rehabilitation professionals provide unique services because of their specialized knowledge of disabilities, environmental factors that interact with those disabilities and the processes that support an effective return to work and / or return to function.

### *Mission Statement*

The Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRA Canada) is a national association that supports its members in promoting, providing and advocating for the delivery of vocational/prevocational rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities.

Rehabilitation professionals work with persons with disabilities and disadvantages and their families to provide services and supports such as assessment, affective / adjustment counselling, life care planning, vocational / career counselling, disability management, case management, and job development / placement services. They facilitate, manage and implement individual rehabilitation plans to ensure effective vocational and avocational outcomes in the most integrated setting possible.

Members are employed as rehabilitation counsellors and consultants, life care planners, vocational counsellors and consultants, career counsellors, disability managers, return to work coordinators, case managers, vocational assessors / evaluators and job development / placement specialists. Members also work in medical rehabilitation and include rehabilitation nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, chiropractors, kinesiologists, psychologists, medical doctors and other medical specialists.

VRA Canada has evolved as an umbrella association representing professionals who are employed in many facets of rehabilitation. The Association recognizes the strength in its diversity of members and recognizes that rehabilitation is not one discipline specific but characterized by many disciplines. This diversity ensures an interdisciplinary approach and fosters trans-disciplinary alliances in rehabilitation.

Membership is open to anyone working in the field of rehabilitation and to those who are interested in furthering the cause of the Association. Membership categories have been defined to reflect the various components of the rehabilitation process. *Professional* members include:

Allied Health Professionals, Life Care Planners, Career Developers / Planners, Disability Managers, Case Managers / Rehabilitation Service Coordinators, Educators / Instructors, Employment Specialists, Forensic Assessors, Managers of Rehabilitation Services, Psychosocial Rehabilitation Specialists (Addictions Counsellors, Acquired Brain Injury Specialists, Affective / Adjustment Counsellors, Mental Health Practitioners, Therapeutic Recreation Specialists), Rehabilitation Counsellors / Consultants, Rehabilitation Practitioners (Job Coaches, Life Skills Coaches, Community Support Workers, Residential Counsellors, Technologists), Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellors / Consultants, Work Transition Specialists, Ergonomists, and Vocational Evaluators / Assessors.

*Associate* members are principally allied health professionals and / or people who are gaining work or educational experience to qualify to write their CRC, CCVE or CVRP examinations or to qualify to apply for their RRP, RVP or RCSS designation. This category also includes people who join the Association to access important networking and educational opportunities.

*Student* members are full-time students in a related field at a post-secondary college or university.

## **A Registry Opportunity for Members with a Related Diploma**

### **RCSS Background - The Canadian Context**

The first college programs designed to prepare graduates to work with individuals with disabilities were established in the early 1970's. The establishment of these programs was in response to provincial initiatives to move people from institutional settings to community living alternatives. Since the original programs were established, many post-secondary facilities have responded with programs to meet the demand for values driven, competent, knowledgeable and trained staff to support individuals with disabilities in meaningful activities across communities in Canada.

The curriculum to prepare graduates to work in rehabilitation is diverse but, in most cases, does include the academic core competencies through a course complement focused on values, ethics, assessment strategies, intervention strategies, communication, planning and community support. Typically, course work at institutions with similar diploma offerings is recognized for direct credit transfer by sister institutions.

For the past several years, post-secondary institutions have been challenged to recognize learning that occurs outside of the college and university systems. To that end, most institutions have developed a system that allows learners to present a portfolio of employment experience and ongoing training for purposes of assessing post-secondary credit.

In Alberta, the University of Calgary recognizes coursework completed at a diploma level for credit transfer to a university program. Initially the arrangements were course by course but since 1998 the two-year college programs have received full credit. In addition, many colleges have developed systems to assess prior learning for credit.

Community rehabilitation and disability is at a crossroads in Canada. High turnover, increasing demand for services and a focus on community development requires that individuals entering this profession are extremely well prepared. Post-secondary education is also at a critical point in Canada. If colleges and universities are to contribute to the development and support of rehabilitation as a profession, support must be forthcoming for a professional association that provides a benchmark for professionalism, fosters professional growth and development and promotes a high standard of ethical conduct. The Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada is such a professional association, one that provides an option of registration in recognition of career and educational achievements for the multi-disciplinary field of rehabilitation in Canada.

### **Registered Community Support Specialist (RCSS)**

Since May 2000, the National Standards and Credentials Committee has been working with college representatives to determine the process for a registry designation for those individuals who are providing front-line community based supports to persons with disabling conditions, chronic health, mental health and addictions. In Canada, a good portion of trained workers in this facet of rehabilitation are prepared at the college diploma level.

VRA Canada's potential support of a "career ladder" concept in the area of the registry is significant in that it recognizes that individuals in the field of rehabilitation gain an initial level of training, enter the labour force, and subsequently re-enter training at a later date. This concept builds on previous knowledge and experience.

The new Registered Community Support Specialist (RCSS) designation is an option for an individual who holds an approved diploma that includes the six academic core competencies (at a college level) of assessment approaches, disabling conditions and/or disadvantaged groups, interventions and strategies, history and systems, ethics, and communication skills.

Recent surveys indicate that a significant number of individuals providing direct service work in the field of rehabilitation have little or no education. Agencies are providing basic skills training such as medication administration, Crisis Prevention Interventions (CPI), and First Aid. In response to this issue the National Standards and Credentials Committee is exploring a potential “grand parenting” clause that would utilize a Prior Learning Assessment Review (PLAR) to determine a combination of credits for skill acquisition and qualifying work experience for the RCSS designation. This would bring these individuals practicing in the field under the umbrella of VRA Canada’s registry. Minimally, this would mean that those individuals would have the same code of conduct governing their practice.

Individuals who achieve the RCSS designation would be included in the Association’s registry. To retain the designation, they must remain as a member, adhere to the standards and ethics of the Association and would be required to complete 50 education units within a five-year period.

### **Progressing to the Next Step**

If members wish to move from the RCSS designation to the Registered Vocational Professional (RVP) designation, they would need to show core competencies at the college and / or university level in:

- the NOC Handbook,
- vocational assessments / approaches,
- vocational counselling / interviewing,
- case management / report writing,
- labour market research / job searching / supportive employment training / job development, and
- ethics.

They would also need to complete the RVP application form, include a job description and resume, submit a sample employment plan, provide 2 references completed on the supplied reference forms and pay the RVP application fee.

If members wish to move from the RCSS designation to the Registered Rehabilitation Professional (RRP®) designation, they would require a minimum of an undergraduate degree, achievement of academic core competencies at a university level and demonstrate 24 months of approved work experience. The core competencies are:

- assessment approaches,
- disabling conditions and diverse groups,
- interventions and strategies,
- values, history and systems related to human services,
- professional ethics, and
- communication, helping and interviewing skills.

There is also an application form, requirement for 2 references on the supplied reference form, and an application fee.

### **Conclusion**

It is interesting to note, that there is currently no organization in North America that provides a registry for practicing professionals that embraces the career ladder of related diplomas and undergraduate diplomas in rehabilitation. Our neighbour to the south is looking to Canada for direction. VRA Canada can provide that leadership in the field of rehabilitation.

## **Section A: Introduction**

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The Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada, hereafter referred to as VRA Canada, in furthering its objectives of ensuring professional standards for its members, administers a registration process. The registration process is an effective means of communicating to the person receiving services, to payers and to industry agencies that members have achieved and demonstrated a recognized level of professional competence in the field of rehabilitation.

VRA Canada awards the Registered Community Support Specialist (RCSS) designation in keeping with the Association's Mission Statement: The Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRA Canada) is a national association that supports its members in promoting, providing and advocating for the delivery of vocational / prevocational rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities.

The decision to grant the RCSS designation is based on a careful review and evaluation of the applicant's education. Although the VRA Canada National Board of Directors is responsible for approving policies and procedures for the approval process and therefore the integrity of the review process, the authority for granting the designation is given to the National Registration Review Committee, a sub-committee of the National Standards and Credentials Committee. The Review Committee is comprised of professional members of the Association who have extensive rehabilitation experience in the public and private sectors.

A member found in violation of the Association's Code of Ethics could have their membership and their RCSS designation revoked. The Canons or Sections of the Code are highlighted in the membership application package; the complete Code of Ethics document is given to new members, and is posted on the Association's web site, [www.vracanada.com](http://www.vracanada.com), in the Code of Ethics section.

## **Section B: RCSS Application Process**

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1. The applicant **must** be a member in good standing with VRA Canada and the required membership fee must be paid in full before the application can be reviewed.
2. Only fully completed applications will be presented to the National Registration Review Committee. Applications incomplete after one year from the date of submission will no longer be considered and must be resubmitted along with the application fee under the current guidelines at the time of the application.

## **Section C: Academic Requirements**

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In order to qualify for the RCSS designation, the minimum of a diploma is required including academic core competencies.

1. Official academic transcript(s) **must** accompany the application. The transcript must include the seal of the college, signature of the registrar, and verification that the program was successfully completed.
2. Fulfillment of the academic core competency courses may have been taken within the diploma or external to the diploma and must be a half-credit course (minimum of 20 hours). A catalogue course description or course syllabus must be attached to enable the National Registration Review Committee to review the course content.

The National Registration Review Committee will review, on an individual basis, other academic programs, not listed on the following chart:

| <b>Registered Community Support Specialist (RCSS)</b>  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Related Diplomas</b>  | <b>Unrelated Diplomas</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Career Development / Planning</li> <li>♦ Case Management</li> <li>♦ Child and Youth Care Worker</li> <li>♦ Community Rehabilitation</li> <li>♦ Developmental Service Worker</li> <li>♦ Disability Studies</li> <li>♦ Disability Management</li> <li>♦ Life Care Planning</li> <li>♦ Social Work</li> <li>♦ Therapeutic Recreation</li> <li>♦ Other related diplomas would be considered if they meet the academic core competencies outlined below.</li> </ul> <p>Diplomas <b>must</b> include the following academic core competencies to be considered approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Assessment Approaches</li> <li>♦ Disabling Conditions and / or Disadvantaged Groups</li> <li>♦ Intervention and Strategies</li> <li>♦ History, Values and Systems Related to Human Services</li> <li>♦ Professional Ethics</li> <li>♦ Communication Skills / Interviewing / Helping Skills</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Education</li> <li>♦ Physics</li> <li>♦ Sociology</li> <li>♦ Other programs that do not include the academic core competencies listed below.</li> </ul> <p>With an unrelated diploma, applicants <b>must</b> have completed the following academic core competencies to be considered approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Assessment Approaches</li> <li>♦ Disabling Conditions and / or Disadvantaged Groups</li> <li>♦ Intervention and Strategies</li> <li>♦ History, Values and Systems Related to Human Services</li> <li>♦ Professional Ethics</li> <li>♦ Communication Skills / Interviewing / Helping Skills</li> </ul> |

**Section D: Criteria for Evaluating Academic Credentials**

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Applicants must have obtained a diploma from:

- ♦ A government-approved or authorized diploma-granting institution of higher education in Canada,
- ♦ The United States or
- ♦ A university in another country that has been recognized or authorized by an appropriate authority of that jurisdiction.

In addition to the diploma, the following core competency courses **must** be taken. The minimum of one half-credit course (minimum 20 hours) in each of the following areas is required. These courses **must** be completed before eligibility for the designation will be considered. It is expected that each course taken to achieve the academic core competencies will provide applicants with general knowledge in each area.

Field Study / Experience, which is a required component to achieve the diploma, is not eligible as a core competency course. Workshops, seminars and conferences are not eligible as a core competency as there is no measurable outcome.

## **1. Assessment Approaches**

A course in Assessment Approaches will address the theory, practice and terminology of the assessment process and the context in which assessment occurs. The content of the course may encompass the use of standard tests in areas that include achievement, aptitude, interests, personality, situational testing and behavioral observations. The content of the course may include instruction in the administration, application and interpretation of assessment data.

- Able to use basic assessment approaches, tools and principles such as functional checklists.
- Assessment strategies that relate to functional skills, activities of daily living and skills and behaviours that are part of typical environmental expectations are emphasized.
- Able to design assessment approaches that are individualized.

## **2. Disabling Conditions and/or Disadvantaged Groups**

A course in this area will address disabling conditions from a life span perspective (child, adolescent, adult or senior). The study of each disabling condition or disadvantaged group makes reference to causes (genetic/medical/social), incidence rates, prevention, adaptive devices and amelioration or expected improvement. Impacts and responses to a disability on the individual with the disability, their families, social groups and society may also be presented.

## **3. Interventions and Strategies**

This course will present approaches and strategies to support and rehabilitate individuals seeking intervention. The course may include theories such as learning and behaviour, counselling, developmental, and psychoanalysis, and ethical criteria for intervention strategies. Models of intervention such as transition, community support, early intervention, adaptations; practice, rule adaptation, technology, structural analysis, physical therapy, enrichment; traditional areas of intervention; and language, cognition, physical and emotional, social relationships may be studied. The course may also include working partnerships and roles in planning (working with specialist, multi-disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and trans-disciplinary teams, individual program planning, case coordination and management, community relationships), crisis intervention, prevention and follow-up, and recording the intervention process and outcomes.

## **4. Values, History and Systems Related to Human Services**

This course will address personal values and beliefs about individuals who have a disability or are disadvantaged and will consider how societal attitudes have developed over the years. Historical practices and paradigm shifts will be studied with resulting service provision changes as well as current issues and trends affecting individuals with disabilities in rehabilitation. Social role valorization, ethics, client's rights and professional responsibility are concepts discussed within the context of this course.

- Understands the historical perspective of major systems and policies.
- Able to demonstrate values and beliefs such as integrity, open-mindedness, respect, non-judgmental attitude and sensitivity.
- Must be aware of the consideration of social attitudes

## **5. Professional Ethics**

A course in ethics will cover topics such as informed consent, confidentiality, professional boundaries, limits of competence, record-keeping, advertising practices, research, and jurisprudence. The course may include ethical decision-making processes (e.g., resolution of ethical conflicts, integration of ethical principles and legal requirements). There will be a review of relevant codes of ethics and ethical decision-making models.

- Demonstrates the awareness of professional ethical decision-making processes and practices these, includes client rights and professional responsibility.



## 6. Communication / Helping / Interviewing Skills

This course will include the theoretical explanation and practical experience of functional interpersonal skills with an application of these skills in context of interviewing and conducting an effective counselling relationship. The course will utilize didactic skill practice and lab simulation coordinated with theoretical presentation and usually includes sequencing from self-awareness to interpersonal competence to effective helping.

- Able to develop empowering professional relationships with individuals and groups that facilitates increased self-efficacy, autonomy and self-esteem.
- Able to communicate and demonstrate respect for the dignity and autonomy of people, responsible caring in the best interest of people, integrity in professional relationships and responsibility to society.
- Able to help people effectively advocate for themselves.

### Knowledge Domains for Designation – RCSS

#### Area of Practice

- To provide services and supports such as community inclusion, residential support, program implementation and / or job coaching.
- Responsibilities may include; direct client support, monitoring of progress, development and implementation of rehabilitation plans, client advocacy.

#### Target Population

- People who are experiencing difficulties with life functions, activities of daily living as a result of poverty, abuse, limited education, lack of social skills, un/underemployment and / or disabilities.

#### Areas of Professional Concern

- Understands the health implications of disabling conditions and the impacts and responses to the disability by affected individuals, their families and social groups.
- Understands the impact of systemic discrimination, self-efficacy beliefs and self-esteem have on motivation.

### Section E: Application Fee

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1. The required application fee of \$78.75 (AB, SK, MB, QC, PE; 5% GST included) or \$84.00 (BC; 12% HST included) or \$84.75 (ON, NB, NS, NL; 13% HST included) must accompany the application. VRA Canada accepts payment in the forms of cheque made payable to the Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada Inc., VISA or MasterCard.
2. This application fee is a one time, non-refundable fee.
3. A receipt will be mailed directly to the applicant.

## **Section F: Reporting Results of the RCSS Review Process**

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Once a decision is reached, documentation is recorded as approved, deferred or denied and directed to the Chair or designate for final signature.

The applicant is notified of the Committee's decision by email or in writing only. Verbal decisions will **not** be provided.

Where an application for registration is deferred, it is the applicant's responsibility to submit the additional information requested in writing. The application fee does not apply when the additional information is received within a year of the application.

## **Section G: Appeals Process**

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Where an application for registration is denied, the applicant has the right of appeal. When the National Registration Review Committee upholds its original decision, an Appeals Panel of the National Board of Directors will consider the applicant's appeal further.

1. Within 21 days of receiving the Committee's written decision, wherein the application for registration has been denied, the applicant may file a written appeal.
2. The National Registration Review Committee will again review the original application along with any additional information, which may accompany the letter of appeal.
3. Where the National Registration Review Committee confirms its original decision, the applicant will be so advised and the appeal will be directed to an Appeals Panel of the National Board of Directors.
4. The Appeals Panel is normally comprised of the President and two (2) registered members. Where necessary, the President may appoint an Appeals Panel of three (3) registered members.
5. The Appeals Panel will be provided with the applicant's file in order to render a final decision. The decision of the National Board of Directors will not be revealed until the Appeals Panel has completed its review and made a recommendation.
6. The Appeals Panel will render its decision within 30 days and advise the applicant in writing.

## **Section H: Certificates of Registration**

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1. The National office updates the member's profile on the website. The member can then automatically print a VRA designation certificate recognizing their achievement in gaining the RCSS.
2. Certificates of Registration identify the date the member joined the Association, the date that the registration is up for renewal and indicates the member's membership number. Certificates are valid for a five-year period and will be renewed following continuing membership with VRA Canada and the submission of the required 50 clock hours of approved Continuing Educational Credits (CEU). See Section N.
3. Certificates of registration include the following clause: ***"All Certificates of Registration remain the property of the Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada, and must be returned to the National Office should the members' registration be revoked."***

## **Section I: Maintaining the RCSS Designation**

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Registered members must be a member in good standing with the Association, adhere to the Association's Code of Ethics and submit proof of 50 approved Continuing Education Units (CEU's) over a five (5) year period.

1. A registered member's designation will be revoked when the member ceases to be in good standing with the Association and may be revoked when it is proven the member has failed to comply with the Association's Code of Ethics.
2. A registered member's designation will be revoked when the member ceases to provide evidence of accumulating 50 approved Continuing Education Units (CEU's) within a five (5) year period of achieving the RCSS designation or a five-year period following a process approved by the National Board.
3. The member will be directed to details related to the continuing education process on the website following approval of the RVP application.

## **Section J: Reinstating the RCSS Designation**

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1. A member whose registration designation has lapsed must request in writing for reinstatement describing why membership has lapsed.
2. After careful consideration of correspondence submitted, the National Registration Review Committee may once only grant a reinstatement of the RCSS designation.
3. A reinstatement fee of \$78.75 (AB, SK, MB, QC, PE; 5% GST included) or \$84.00 (BC; 12% HST included) or \$84.75 (ON, NB, NS, NL; 13% HST included) applies and must be paid in full before the request for reinstatement will be reviewed.
4. The annual professional VRA Canada membership fee must be paid in full for the year the reinstatement has been requested.
5. Applicants re-applying for registration **must** qualify under the guidelines that are in place at the time of the application for reinstatement.
6. Members must renew their membership by February 28<sup>th</sup> of each year to validate the RCSS.

## **Section K: Leave of Absence - Professional Member Requesting a Leave of Absence**

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1. A professional member can request a one year Leave of Absence due to illness or maternity leave. The request must be sent to the National office in writing and must be signed and dated by the member.
2. The member is then notified by email or phone that the request has been granted and the designation renewal date has been adjusted by one year.

## **Section L: Change of Address**

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- ❖ It is the applicant's responsibility to notify the Association of any change to their contact information (name, address, phone, fax, and e-mail).
- ❖ Keeping the Association up to date is important, as a registered member's designation will be revoked if the member does not renew their membership by February 28<sup>th</sup> each year and ceases to be a member in good standing.
- ❖ Registered members must renew their registration at five-year intervals by providing evidence of accumulating 50 approved Continuing Education Units (CEU's).
- ❖ It is the member's responsibility to re-register at the appropriate time. Failure to receive the required information is not considered grounds for an extension.

## **Section M: Contacting the Association**

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All questions should be directed to:

**Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRA Canada)**

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Renfrew, Ontario, K7V 1J6  
1-888-876-9992 / [continuinged@vraCanada.com](mailto:continuinged@vraCanada.com)

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