

# The Alaskan Core Competencies Comparison Tool

A Checklist for  
Comparing Existing Curricula or Competencies  
With the New Alaskan Core Competencies



COMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE COMPETENCY

*A Project of the*  
Committee on Workforce Competency  
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, Workforce Development Focus Area

**Electronic copies:** Available for download at [www.mhtrust.org](http://www.mhtrust.org) (select “Focus Areas” and “Workforce Development”) or at [www.annapoliscoalition.org](http://www.annapoliscoalition.org) (select “Alaskan Core Competencies”).

**For additional information** contact: Michael Hoge at [michael.hoge@yale.edu](mailto:michael.hoge@yale.edu) (203-785-5629) or Mimi McFaul at [mmcfaul@wiche.edu](mailto:mmcfaul@wiche.edu) (303-541-0288).

**To submit feedback:** Go to [www.annapoliscoalition.org](http://www.annapoliscoalition.org) and click on the link to the Alaskan Core Competencies. Your comments, questions, and recommendations for future revisions are encouraged.

**Recommended citation:** M.A. Hoge and M. McFaul (eds). *Alaskan Core Competencies for Direct Care Workers in Health and Human Services: Comparison Tool*. Anchorage, AK: The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, 2010.

**Acknowledgments:** Numerous individuals have contributed to this document. They include: leadership and staff from The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, the University of Alaska, and the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services; members of the Committee on Workforce Competency (CWC); and CWC Co-Chairs from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services - Melissa Stone, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health, and Kimberly Poppe-Smart, Acting Director, Division of Senior and Disability Services; and

**Permissions to Use:** Individuals and organizations in Alaska are granted the right to use the Alaskan Core Competencies and this document for non-profit purposes that are designed to strengthen the state’s health and human services. Please provide notice of your use of the competencies so that such activity can inform efforts to promote their adoption throughout Alaska. That notice, along with requests to use the competencies and related documents outside of Alaska, should be directed to Kathy Craft at [Kathryn.Craft@alaska.gov](mailto:Kathryn.Craft@alaska.gov) or 907-388-3501.

© 2010, *The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, and The Annapolis Coalition on the Behavioral Health Workforce*

## Purpose of this Document

---

A broad coalition of individuals and agencies in Alaska has embarked on a multi-year effort to strengthen the skills of direct care workers employed in diverse health and human service sectors. The first major product of this effort, the *Alaskan Core Competencies*, was released in January of 2010. Drawing on national competency sets and the experience of Alaskans, it specifies a core set of skills that have relevance for working with multiple populations and disability groups.

The competencies will soon be incorporated into a standardized curriculum that can be used to train the direct care workforce. However, the Alaskan Core competencies can also be used to systematically review existing curricula or other competency sets in use within Alaska to determine the extent to which they adequately cover the core competencies. With that knowledge, existing curricula and competencies could be updated to cover these core competencies, which have been deemed to be essential to current practice. While the competencies were designed for direct care workers who have not had the benefit of higher education in health and human services, they contain basic helping skills that are relevant to and should be incorporated in associate, bachelors, and graduate level education as well.

This document provides a checklist for comparing any curriculum, competency set, or other training or educational program to the Alaskan Core Competencies. The information immediately below provides a more detailed explanation of the overall competency initiative. Specific instructions for using the Comparison Tool follow that overview.

To access electronic copies of this Comparison Tool, the Alaskan Core Competencies, or a range of related documents, go to [www.anapoliscoalition.org](http://www.anapoliscoalition.org) and click on the link to the competencies. Your feedback on this initiative and its products can be submitted electronically at that website as well.

## Project Overview & Background

---

### Strengthening the Direct Care Workforce

There is increasing recognition of the major role of direct care workers in the nation's health and social service systems. Known also as direct service workers, direct support workers, direct support professionals, paraprofessionals, or technicians, these individuals are routinely asked to provide care to individuals and families facing complex and serious problems. Yet their educational background is often limited to a high school degree or GED, their preparation for care giving roles tends to be quite brief, and the supervision and supports received while on the job quite minimal. Their challenges are even more significant in rural and frontier regions of the country where they may work autonomously and in relative isolation from other health and human service providers.

### The Alaskan Initiative

The need to better prepare and support this sector of the workforce has been increasingly recognized. A diverse coalition of individuals within Alaska highlighted direct care workers as a priority area in the state's workforce development efforts. The result has been a multi-phased effort to improve the competency of these workers by: (1) developing a core set of competencies relevant to the care of diverse populations and disability groups; (2) creating tools that can be used to assess the competency of direct care workers at the conclusion of training or during employment, and (3) building a standardized curriculum to train direct care workers in the competencies.

The Alaskan Core Competencies were completed and released in 2010. They were created by distilling and integrating the shared competencies from nationally recognized competency sets developed for specific population or disability groups. These were further informed and modified by competencies crafted for practice in Alaska and by the expert opinion of Alaskans who served as project raters. The workforce sectors included in the development process were:

long term care; developmental disabilities; addictions; adult mental health; infant and child mental health; peer support (in behavioral health); child development; traumatic brain injury; and community-based juvenile justice. The competencies are most relevant to work in office, community-based, home, and residential environments.

initiatives for the past six years. The Annapolis Coalition on the Behavioral Health Workforce is recognized nationally for its role in workforce planning, policy development, and implementation of workforce best practices ([www.annapoliscoalition.org](http://www.annapoliscoalition.org)). It led the effort to create the federally funded national Action Plan on Behavioral Health Workforce Development, which was released in 2007.

## Understanding the Competencies

There are a total of 10 broad **competency categories** and the categories are broken down into 42 **individual competencies**. Each competency is defined by **behavioral descriptors** at a satisfactory, excellent, and unsatisfactory level of performance. The competencies and their descriptors focus exclusively on the *skills* that workers need to be able to perform. While skills may require underlying *knowledge* and might be enhanced by the *attitudes* of the worker, the Alaskan Core Competencies are intentionally “skill oriented” in order force a sharp focus on the ultimate worker behaviors that are desired. Since the competency set focuses on common or shared competencies, it does not cover *specialty competencies*, which are unique to only one workforce sector.

## The Project Sponsors and Partners

The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, in collaboration with the University of Alaska and the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, is sponsoring multiple efforts to improve the recruitment, retention, training, and education of the state’s health and human service workforce. Organized under The Trust’s Workforce Development Focus Area, this specific initiative has been managed by the Committee on Workforce Competency (formerly known as the Credentialing and Quality Standards Subcommittee or CQSS).

The Trust engaged two organizations to provide technical assistance and staffing to this initiative. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, through its Mental Health Program, brings expertise on rural healthcare delivery and workforce development ([www.wiche.edu/mentalhealth](http://www.wiche.edu/mentalhealth)). It has been assisting Alaska with workforce improvement

## Comparison Tool Instructions

---

The checklist below is designed to facilitate a comparison of any curriculum, competency set, or other educational program with the Alaskan Core Competencies to determine the extent to which the Alaskan Core Competencies are covered in their content of those curricula, competency sets, or programs. Listed below are the simple steps to follow:

1. Select the curricula, competency set, or other educational program for the comparison. This is referred to as the “Comparison Document”.
2. Complete the “Identifying Information” section.
3. Beginning with Competency 1.a., “Listens effectively”, search the Comparison Document to determine whether it covers this competency.
4. If you need more information in order to understand any Alaskan Core Competency, refer to the full report on those competencies, which can be downloaded at: [www.annapoliscoalition.org](http://www.annapoliscoalition.org) (click on the link to the competencies).
5. For each competency, note in the checklist below where it is covered in the Comparison Document (e.g. note a section heading or section number).
6. Using a checkmark, indicate whether the competency is adequately covered in the Comparison document. Indicate “Yes” if there is substantive coverage of a competency in the Comparison Document (e.g. it is well defined or described or receives considerable attention). Indicate “No” if there is no reference or only passing reference in the Comparison Document. Indicate “Don’t Know” if you are unsure.
7. Enlist your colleagues to review and address any competencies marked as “Don’t Know” in order to reclassify them as “Yes” or “No”.
8. Tally the number of “Yes”, “No”, and “Don’t Know” responses and enter them at the bottom of the checklist, verifying that they total 42 (the number of individual competencies).
9. Enter “comments and overall conclusions” at the bottom of the checklist.

10. If you are willing to share the findings, please forward to Kathy Craft, who coordinates the Workforce Development Focus Area for the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and its partners. Her email address is: [Kathryn.craft@alaska.gov](mailto:Kathryn.craft@alaska.gov).

How the findings from this comparison are used is up to those conducting the comparison. Some of the Alaskan Core Competencies may not be covered in the Comparison Document, but in your judgment, may not be relevant to your workforce. Alternatively, the findings may lead you to strengthen some of the Alaskan Core Competencies in your curricula or competency set.

If you have questions about this document, email the project consultants: Michael Hoge (Annapolis Coalition) at [michael.hoge@yale.edu](mailto:michael.hoge@yale.edu) or Mimi McFaul (WICHE Mental Health Program) at [mmcfaul@wiche.edu](mailto:mmcfaul@wiche.edu).

# Comparison Checklist

## Identifying Information

Name of Curriculum or Competencies being Compared: \_\_\_\_\_

Author or Source of Curriculum or Competencies: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Comparison: \_\_\_\_\_

Completed by (name, email address, and phone number): \_\_\_\_\_

Alaskan Core Competencies	Curriculum or Competencies Being Compared  Note below where the Alaskan Core Competency is covered in this Curriculum or Competency Set	Adequately Covered?		
		Yes	No	Don't Know
<b>Competency Category 1: Working with Others</b>				
A. Listens effectively				
B. Communicates effectively				
C. Builds positive relationships				
D. Collaborates				
E. Maintains appropriate boundaries				
<b>Competency Category 2: Assessing Strengths and Needs</b>				
A. Gathers and summarizes information				
B. Assists in identifying personal values, goals, and priorities				
C. Identifies strengths and resources				
D. Identifies problems, deficits, and stressors				
E. Detects warning signs				
F. Communicates results clearly				
G. Reassesses routinely				
<b>Competency Category 3: Planning Services</b>				
A. Identifies recommended goals and services				
B. Supports individual and family member decision-making in developing a plan of care				
C. Assists individuals in developing personal plans				
<b>Competency Category 4: Providing Services</b>				
A. Implements and coordinates the plan of care				
B. Conducts outreach and engagement				
C. Maintains safety				
D. Creates a therapeutic learning environment				

E. Provides emotional support				
F. Provides physical support				
G. Teaches and trains				
H. Supports problem solving and conflict resolution				
I. Prevents and intervenes in crises				
J. Organizes and conducts group activities				
K. Promotes health and wellness				
<b>Competency Category 5: Linking to Resources</b>				
A. Identifies recommended resources				
B. Supports individual and family decision-making in selecting resources				
C. Connects individuals and families to community resources				
<b>Competency Category 6: Advocating</b>				
A. Advocates on behalf of the individual and family				
B. Supports self-advocacy				
<b>Competency Category 7: Individualizing Care</b>				
A. Assesses the influence of key individual, family, and community characteristics				
B. Tailors services to unique individual, family, and community characteristics				
C. Modifies plans and services based on individual and family experience				
<b>Competency Category 8: Documenting</b>				
A. Completes required documentation				
B. Balances privacy with documentation requirements				
<b>Competency Category 9: Behaving Professionally and Ethically</b>				
A. Fulfills responsibilities and commitments				
B. Complies with laws, regulations, policies, and ethical codes				
C. Seeks supervision and consultation				
D. Manages stress and maintains personal health				
<b>Competency Category 10: Developing Professionally</b>				
A. Seeks opportunities to improve knowledge, skills, and abilities				
B. Uses performance evaluations and feedback to improve performance				

