



# ReLPAG

**Email: [Relpag1@gmail.com](mailto:Relpag1@gmail.com)**  
**Tel: 0711734963**

**34 Drummond Road, West Beach, Blouberg,  
Cape Town 7441**

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[shireen.noormahomed@kznhealth.gov.za](mailto:shireen.noormahomed@kznhealth.gov.za)

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Dear Sir/Madam

By way of introduction, my name is Anne-Marie Rencken-wentzel, a Counselling and Educational Psychologist. I am the chairperson of ReLPAG. A letter sent by your office was brought to my attention which I would like to respond to. First, I am of the opinion I should shortly introduce ReLPAG to you:

ReLPAG is an action group who voices opinions on behalf of mental health practitioners and the public at large who need mental health services. This group of psychologists have been disenfranchised by 2011 regulations published by the then Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Motsoaledi, in collaboration by the HPCSA. The user of mental health services could no longer according to these published regulations use the services of duly registered, competent and trained psychologists on grounds of a so-called scope of practice. This was despite psychologists being trained in the same classes, following curricula the HPCSA regarded as proficient programmes and completed internship at accredited internship institutions the HPCSA had appointed together with recognised internship programmes.

This boggled the mind that the HPCSA and the Chairperson of the Professional Board of Psychology no longer trusted their own training programmes and internship institutions and regarded the training of a number of psychologists which were unilaterally put in specific categories 'unqualified' to do what they have been doing for many years.

This deprived, in some instances, whole communities of services of the only health professional in that area. This severed ties between clients and their mental health professional; interrupted carefully executed mental health progress and cost Joe Public money and time they did not have. Time to travel long distances to 'acceptable' mental health professionals according to the Scope of Practice. These 'acceptable' practitioners often did not have space and time for the influx of new clients, did not speak the same language as the clients and often followed a different frame of work as the previous therapist did. These clients lost what was gained and, in most cases, did not have the resourcefulness to start afresh. ReLPAG regarded this as a waste of money and a waste of human effort and resources in a country with poor resources in mental health services where little of the health budget is spent on mental health. This led to a Life Esidimeni of its own.

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(1)Nomine Officii: In this and every other document, this abbreviation indicates that this executive member of ReLPAG is acting in the capacity as executive member and are in total not responsible and therefore indemnified in his personal capacity.

ReLPAG did not leave it there but acted decisively. Two court cases followed in the Western Cape division of the High Court in Cape Town. The first was launched in 2012 which was settled in November 2016. According to the settlement the Minister of Health was to revise the Regulations and was given a two- year period in which to do so.

In around August 2018 Minister Motsoaledi's attempt at regulations was vague and not understandable. There were criticism and of course submissions on this draft. On 9 November 2018 close to the date the two years ended, the Minister of Health brought an urgent application in the same court in Cape Town for an extension. ReLPAG once again challenged the Minister of Health's application as it was clear to ReLPAG this was not a priority on the agenda of the Department of Health or the minister had painted himself in a corner.

ReLPAG opposed the application and was given a day to respond. The court granted another day to ReLPAG to file an opposing affidavit. This time on extremely short notice ReLPAG was aware of its duty to oppose this very important application. ReLPAG saw it as a task in the interest of both the disenfranchised group of psychologists as well as the mental health users, specifically including the children, the most vulnerable group. This needs to be considered in the context where there is one psychologist per 69,000 learners in South Africa.

This action paid off as ReLPAG was offered costs from both the HPCSA and the Minister of Health in 2016; and although the Minister of Health was granted the 6 months extension which lapsed on 9 May 2019, the Hon Mr Justice made a cost order against the Minister of Health.

Needless to say, Minister Aaron Motsoaledi did not change regulations. It was on 5/9/2019 that Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize signed an end to the Scope of Practice regulations. He indicated he received overwhelming response from the public and declared in the Government Gazette of 13 September 2019 the 2008 regulations are in force and not the 2018 and inter alia the 2011 regulations. Accordingly, these regulations pertain to all psychologists registered with the HPCSA and does not give one group more status than the other. More so, the onus is like before on the psychologist according to ReLPAG to provide proof of training, supervision, experience and ultimately competency. The latter is set out in the ethical code of the profession. This has always been the case.

The matter at hand that ReLPAG wants to bring to your attention is in connection with a document released by the Department of Health and emanated from: RK Khan Circle Chatsworth 4092 which is Effective 1 May 2019. This was addressed to OPD Doctors from the Clinical Psychology Head. I will not repeat the full document, but will summarise the essential parts:

1. From 1 May Department of Clinical Psychology will only accept referrals from Psychiatry ...
2. ...refer mental health users to Psychiatry. Suicidal, psychotic, depressed, anxious traumatised etc. patients will be screened and stabilised by Psychiatry staff first...
3. No intellectual assessments will be done for disability grants ... or for education IQ assessments placements and learnership matters etc. these matters are for school principals to attend to and the Department of Education.

This Strategic Transformation of Service Delivery due to:

- Clinical Psychology crises &
- Scope of Practice of Clinical Psychology

The **first** point which concerns ReLPAG's complainant is that there are not enough psychologists in the country to meet the mental needs of the citizens of South Africa.

The **second** point is the **Scope of Practice, set out in your document, is now redundant** as the Hon Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize has recalled the Scope of Practice as set out in (which at its basis had the 2011 Scope of Practice) and the latest attempt at new Regulations 2018. The Regulations as set out in 2008 are in force per the Government Gazette of 13 September 2019 as signed by the Minister of Health on 5 September 2019. This thus means in effect a psychologist who is trained, received supervision, and is experienced according to the regulations in force and is competent, may treat a client which was deemed the sole terrain of psychiatry and clinical psychology. There is no longer a Scope of Practice according to categories which were forced on a number of psychologists.

ReLPAG and/or its members are not aware that the above stance of 1 May 2019 has been withdrawn and/or altered. It also appears that there is no longer a necessity for the Department of Health to restrict their employment of psychologists to Clinical Psychologists alone. This would drastically improve your crisis in shortage of psychologists in the public service.

ReLPAG will bring this to the attention of the various departments in due course.

ReLPAG is looking forward to your response.

Kind regards

*Anne-Marie Rencken, no*

**ReLPAG, Chairperson**

*Working in your interest with kindness, diligence, integrity and fairness for all*