Preparing Social Workers for the Future of Palliative Care

Susan Blacker, MSW, RSW

Senior Director, Cancer and Palliative Program Planning and Performance, Sinai Health System;

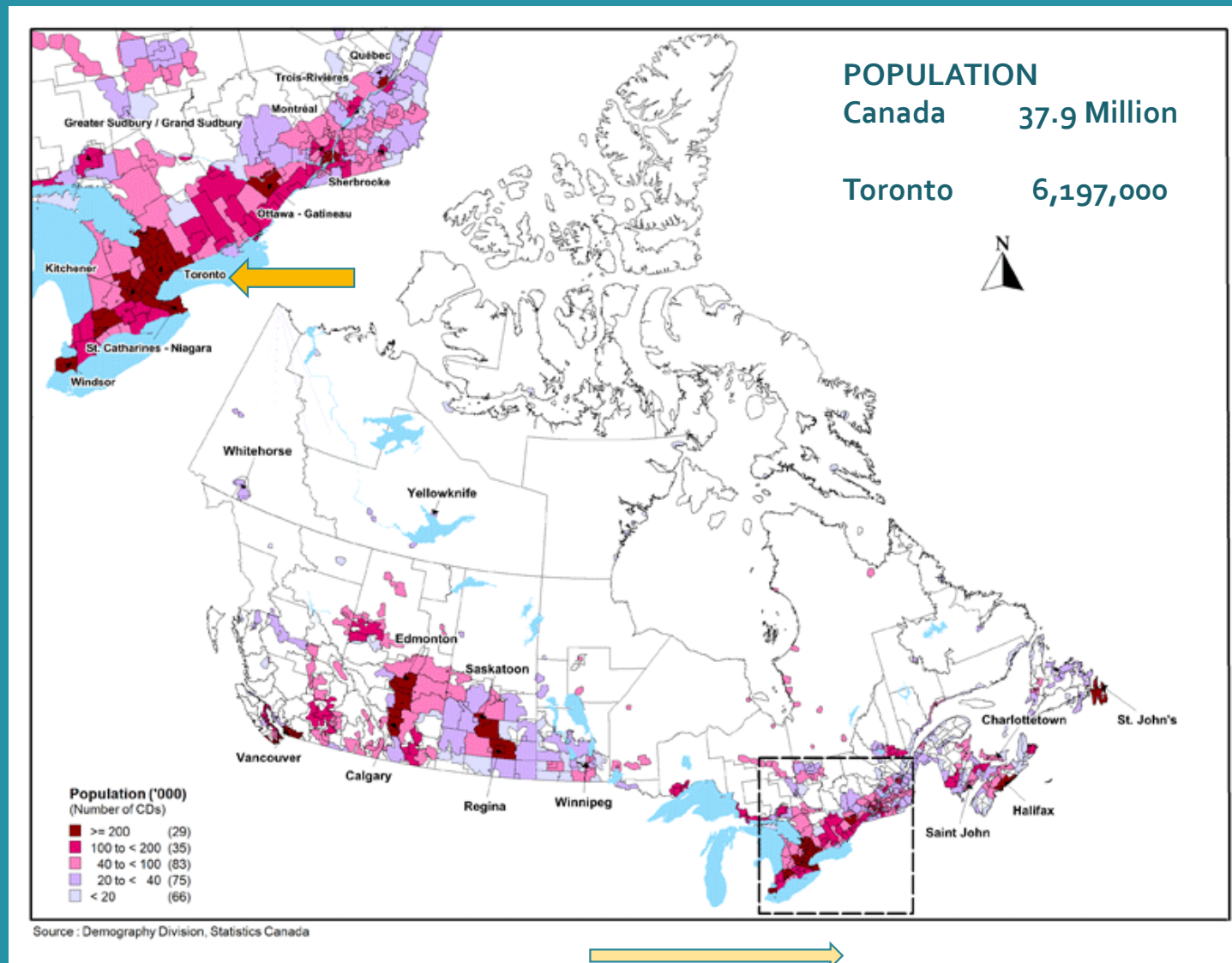Adjunct Professor, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work;

Lecturer (Status-only) Division of Palliative Care/Department of Family & Community Medicine; University of Toronto

TORONTO, CANADA

CONTEXT –

Social Work in Canada

- 2/3 of the population is concentrated near US- Canada border

- Urban (80%), Rural and Remote

- One of the most culturally diverse countries in the world; significant regional diversity as well

POPULATION
Canada   37.9 Million

Toronto   6,197,000

Population ('000)
(Number of CDs)
- >= 200   (29)
- 100 to < 200 (35)
- 40 to < 100   (83)
- 20 to < 40   (75)
- < 20   (66)

Source : Demography Division, Statistics Canada

Population distribution as of July 1, 2012 by census division (CD), Canada

CANADA'S POPULATION IS AGING

A lower population growth rate coupled with increasing life expectancy means that the share of the population over 65 is projected to increase to 25.6 percent by 2068.
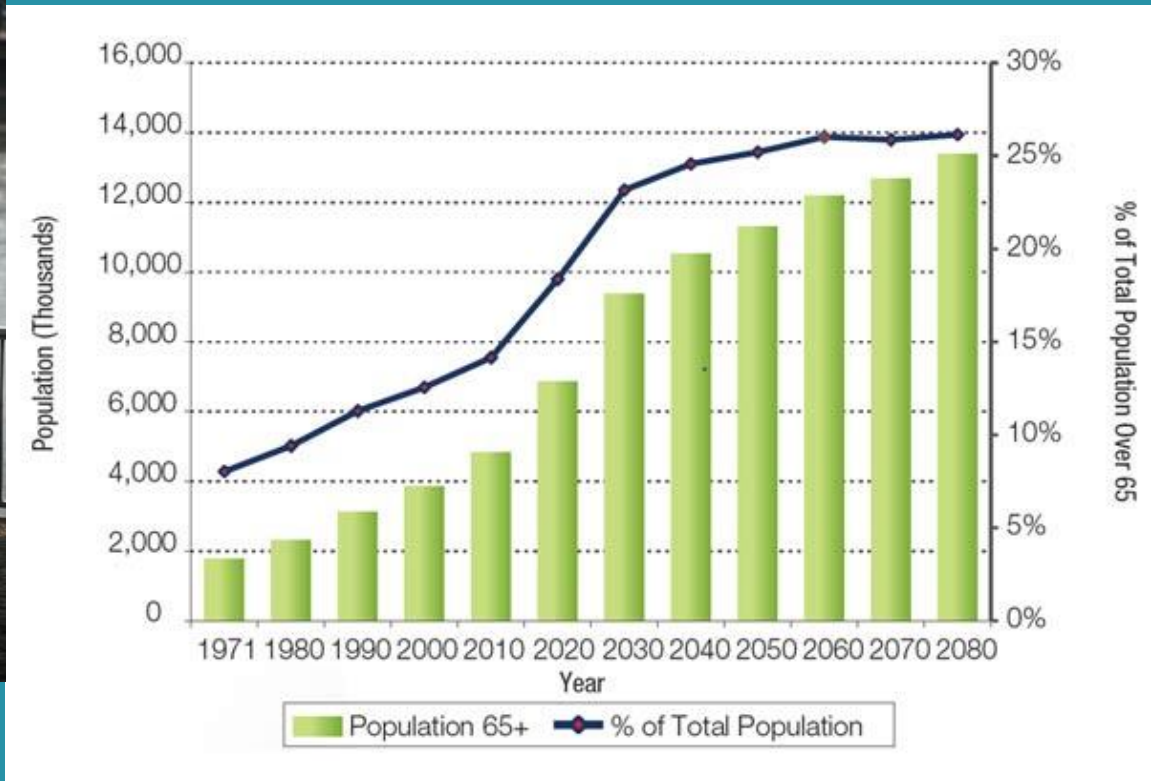
Fraser Institute

Those aged 85 and over are expected to nearly triple to 5.8% of the total population by 2041

Photo by Sheggeor laker on Unsplash

Total and share of population 65 and over by decade, 1971–2080
Source: Statistics Canada (1971-2010) and Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions (2020-2080)

A Growing Need for Social Work in Palliative Care

CARE FOR THOSE WITH SERIOUS ILLNESS

- Early identification of palliative care needs
  - Advance care planning
  - Navigation of resources and supports
  - Adjustment to illness / Resilience
- End of life care needs
  - Decision-making
  - Legacy work

.

CARE FOR CAREGIVERS

- Family members/ support persons
- Health Care Professionals

Photo by Jem Sahagun on Unsplash

GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

- multiplier of 9 significant relationships are impacted b a death (Verdery et al, 2020)
- Grief literacy
- Complicated grief

Settings for Social Work and the Palliative Care Approach

The need for more social workers with palliative care skills across care settings is increasing:
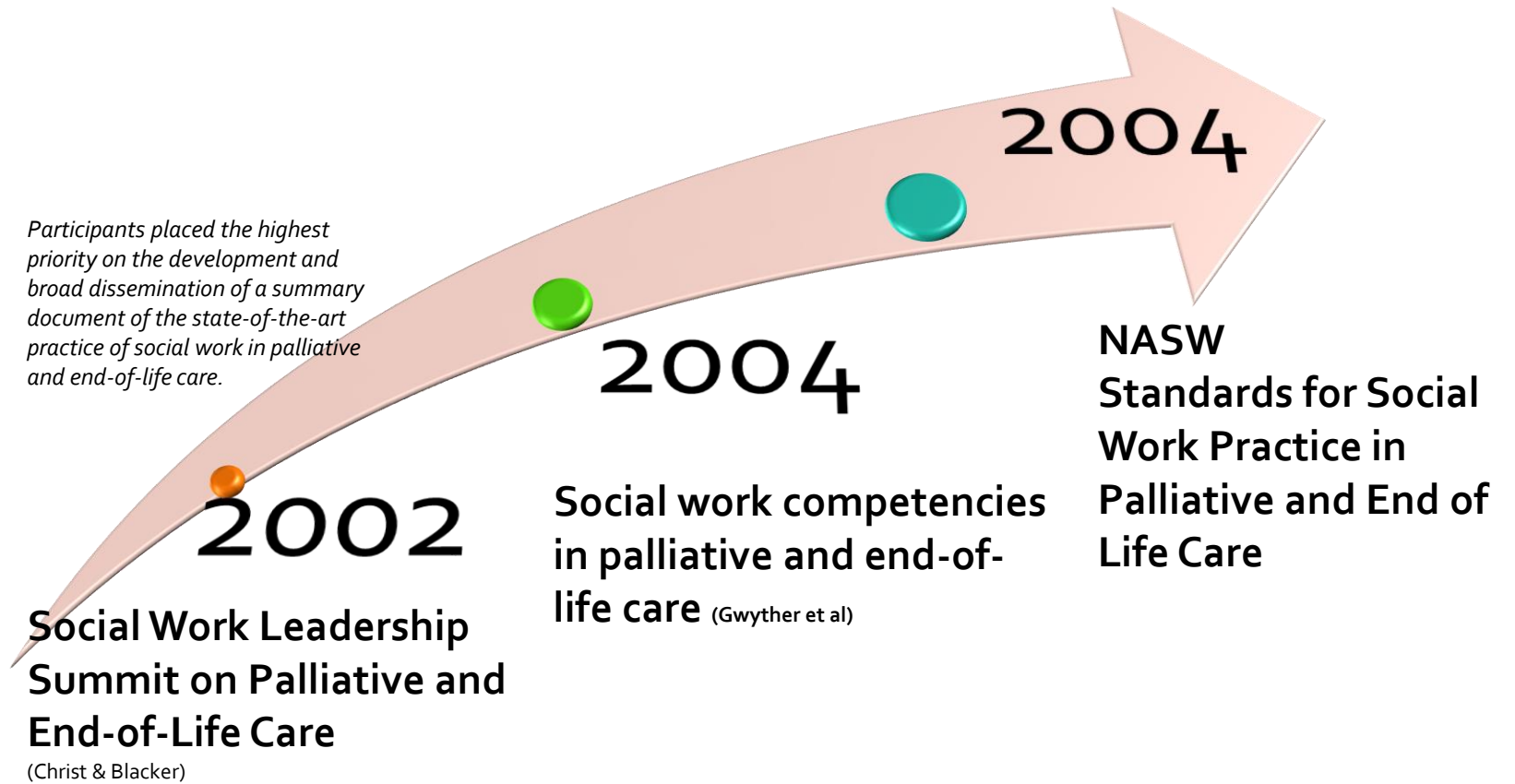
- ❖ Home and community care
- ❖ Residential hospice, Palliative care units
- ❖ Acute care facilities
- ❖ Long-term care facilities,
- ❖ Cancer centres. Other disease specific clinics
- ❖ Other community care programs (ie. Frail seniors)

Palliative care Competencies:

Knowledge, Skills and Values

- Over the past twenty years, the unique role of social work in hospice palliative care has become more clearly defined in Canada, including through the establishment of practice competencies.

Defining Social Work Competencies and Practice Standards in Palliative Care

Participants placed the highest priority on the development and broad dissemination of a summary document of the state-of-the-art practice of social work in palliative and end-of-life care.

2002

Social Work Leadership Summit on Palliative and End-of-Life Care

(Christ & Blacker)

2004

Social work competencies in palliative and end-of-life care (Gwyther et al)

2004

NASW Standards for Social Work Practice in Palliative and End of Life Care

Social Work Competencies in Palliative Care

CANADA

SCOPE
Social Work Competencies On Palliative Education

2009

2019

2021

Canadian Social Work Competencies for Hospice Palliative Care:
A Framework to Guide Education and Practice
at the Generalist and Specialist Levels
2008   (Bosma et a)

Ontario Palliative Care Network
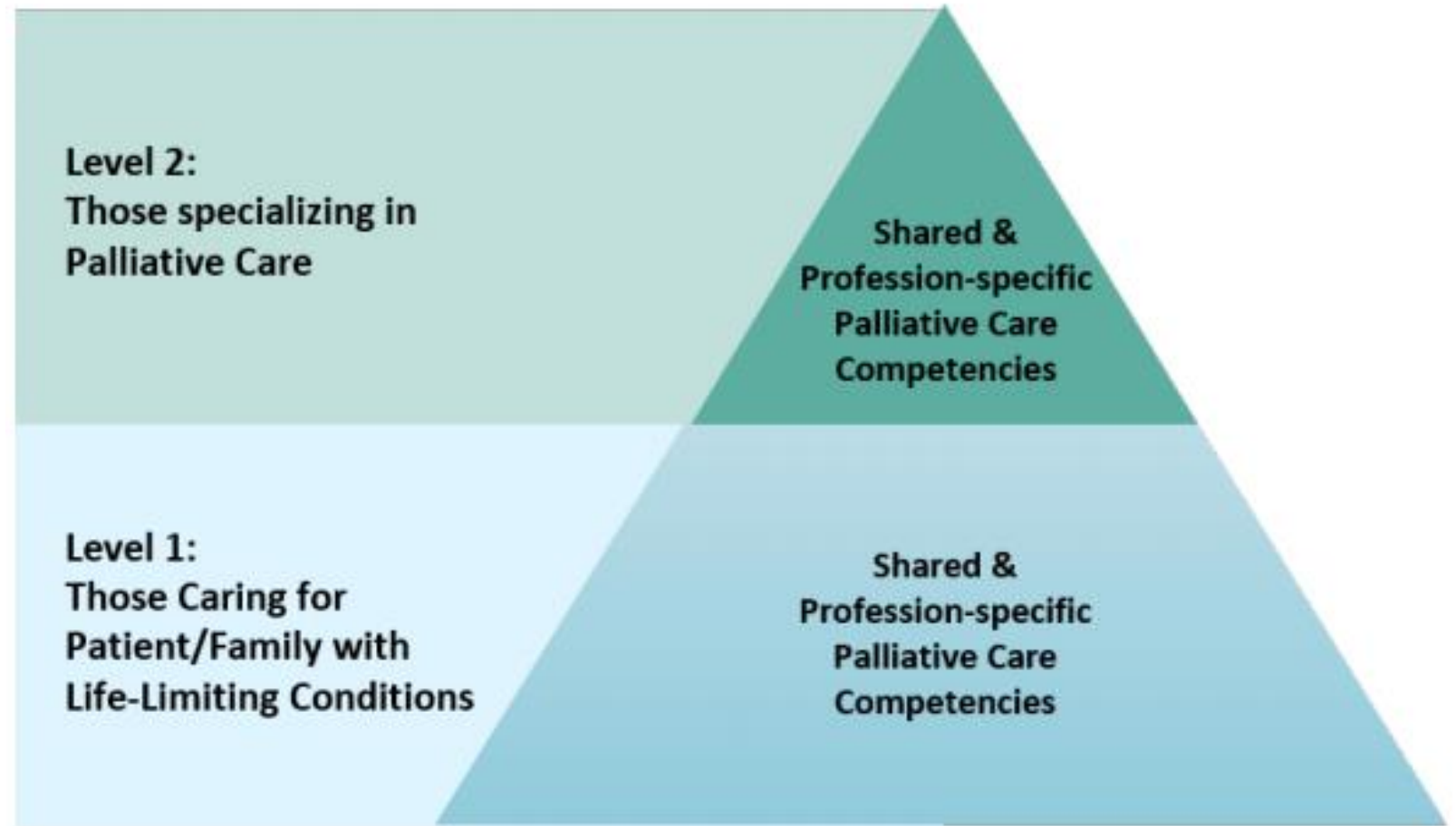
The Ontario Palliative Care Competency Framework
A Reference Guide for Health Professionals and Volunteers

April 2019

Ontario
Local Health Integration Network

Ontario
Cancer Care Ontario

From :
Ontario Palliative Care Competency Framework

Figure 1. Levels of Palliative Care Competencies

Level 2:
Those specializing in
Palliative Care

Shared &
Profession-specific
Palliative Care
Competencies

Level 1:
Those Caring for
Patient/Family with
Life-Limiting Conditions

Shared &
Profession-specific
Palliative Care
Competencies

OPCN Domains of Competency

❖ Principles of Palliative Care

❖ Cultural Safety and Humility

❖ Communication

❖ Optimizing Comfort and Quality of Life

❖ Care Planning and Collaborative Practice

❖ Last Days and Hours

❖ Loss Grief and Bereavement

❖ Professional and Ethical Practice

❖ Self-Care

❖ Education

❖ Research and Evaluation

❖ Advocacy

Ontario
Palliative Care
Network

The Ontario Palliative Care Competency Framework
A Reference Guide for Health Professionals and Volunteers

April 2019

Ontario
Local Health Integration Network

Ontario
Cancer Care Ontario

FUTURE STATE:

Continuum of Learning Opportunities for Social Workers

➢**Foundation training for all MSW level social work students**
- Infusion into range of courses, Exposure to concepts (grief, loss, illness)
- Specialized course for those in Health, Gerontology, other
  - Course; Practicum
  - Micro, Mezzo, Macro levels

➢**Opportunities for more specialized training**

➢**Mentorship**
- Working on palliative care teams, in palliative care units or hospice programs
- Working as members of interprofessional teams such as oncology, nephrology, respirology, cardiology

➢**Continuing education for those already in practice**

➢**Leadership education in palliative care**

Need for more focus in MSW Training

Gap in social work training have been described by Christ & Sormanti in 1999 and more recently by Walsh-Burke & Csikai in 2005.

"Social work education in both BSW and MSW level courses is missing vital content about end-of-life care, palliative care, and bereavement. End-of-life care training opportunities through continuing education programs have also been limited."

Berkman and Stein noted in 2018 survey of that:

"...of the 105 MSW programs in US and Canada, only 10 had courses dedicated to palliative care, 9 of which were part of a specialization/certificate program. Few programs had plans to develop a dedicated course."

➢ Generalist level skiills

➢ Specialist level skiils

Example: MSW level COURSE

Social Work Practice in Palliative Care

Instructor:
Susan Blacker
Factor- Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto

- **13 weeks, 2nd Year MSW program**
- **Now in its 11th year**

Learning Objectives

❖ Recognize how emotional, cultural, socioeconomic factors impact patient and family experience at the end of life;

❖ Understand the philosophy, culture, values and principles of HPC and the role of social work in palliative care;

❖ Describe palliative care as an approach, as well as a distinct service and specialization;

❖ Describe the delivery of HPC services in Canada and the policies shaping palliative care delivery, including social work practice;

❖ Demonstrate comfort in assessing client's needs and formulating goals of care as a member of an interprofessional team, with the patient and family defined as the unit of care;

Course Learning Objectives

❖Demonstrate skills to help families navigate the system of palliative care and identify and advocate for patient and caregiver needs.;

❖ Demonstrate ability to apply evidence-based social work interventions commonly used aligned with the palliative care approach;

❖Discuss considerations in provision of HPC to specific populations, such as older adults and children and culturally diverse clients; and

❖Demonstrate an ability to manage feelings of personal loss in witnessing client needs and strategies for self-care.

Skills focused training

Weekly themes:

- Understanding the palliative care approach

- Social work's role within an interprofessional team

- Patient and family perspectives

- Screening and Assessment of psychosocial/spiritual/cultural domains

- Advance care planning and Goals of Care, Consent

- Family meetings

- Advocacy

- Specific interventions

- Specific populations – pediatrics, older adults, structurally vulnerable/ homeless

- Self care and continue professional development

LESSONS LEARNED :

Preparing Social Work Students for Working in Palliative Care

Core activities:

1/ Creating opportunities for exposure to client stories and narratives is essential to prepare for practice, along with opportunities for self-reflection.

2/ Addressing assumptions and myths that palliative care is only about end of life care is imperative.

3/ Creating a focus on the needs and experiences of patients AND family caregivers is needed.

4/ Providing structured opportunities to practice communication and assessment skills, apply theory to cases examples and to also role model techniques, is highly valued.

5/ Explicitly linking palliative care to other social work values, like health equity and right to self-determination.

Photo by Priscilla Du Preez on Unsplash

REFERENCES

Christ GH, Sormanti M. Advancing social work practice in end-of-life care. Soc Work Health Care. 1999;30(2):81-99. doi: 10.1300/j010v30n02_05. PMID: 10839248.

Christ, GH & Blacker, S. Setting an Agenda for Social Work in End-of-Life and Palliative Care: An Overview of Leadership and Organizational Initiatives. J Soc Work End Life Palliat Care. 2005, 1. 9-22. 10.1300/J457v01n01_02.

Gwyther LP, Altilio T, Blacker S, Christ G, Csikai EL, Hooyman N, Kramer B, Linton J, Raymer M, Howe J. Social work competencies in palliative and end-of-life care. J Soc Work End Life Palliat Care. 2005;1(1):87-120. doi: 10.1300/J457v01n01_06. PMID: 17387058.

Walsh-Burke K, Csikai EL. Professional social work education in end-of-life care: contributions of the Project on Death in America's Social Work Leadership Development program. J Soc Work End Life Palliat Care. 2005;1(2):11-26. doi: 10.1300/J457v01n02_03. PMID: 17387061.

COMPETENCY FRAMEWORKS

SCOPE program (2009)

Bosma H, Johnston M, Cadell S, et al. Creating social work competencies for practice in hospice palliative care. Palliative Medicine. 2010;24(1):79-87. doi:10.1177/0269216309346596

Ontario Palliative Care Network Competency Framework (2019)

https://www.ontariopalliativecarenetwork.ca/resources/palliative-care-competency-framework

STANDARDS

National Association of Social Workers. 2004 (uSA)

Standards for Social Work Practice in Palliative and End of Life Care, http://www.socialworkers.org/practice/bereavement/standards/standardso504New.pdf

References –
Canadian Population Graphs

Population distribution as of July 1, 2012 by census division (CD), Canada

Source: Demography Division, Stats Canada

Accessed at: https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/91-214-x/2011000/m001-eng.htm   June 10, 2021

Total and share of population 65 and over by decade, 1971–2080

Source: Government of Canada — Action for Seniors report (2014)

Table ref.:   Statistics Canada (1971-2010) and Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions (2020-2080)

Accessed at: https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/seniors-action-report.html June 10, 2021