

Berdyansk State Pedagogical University

ANASTASIIA POPOVA

ORCID: 0000-0001-5176-0059; kovaleva.anastasia.45@gmail.com

*Social Workers' Professional Development. Canadian  
Experience and Opportunities for Ukraine*

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Rozwój zawodowy pracowników socjalnych. Doświadczenie Kanady i możliwości dla Ukrainy

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ABSTRACT

The article reveals the basic principles of social workers' **professional development in Canada** and identifies opportunities to use its constructive ideas in the Ukrainian practice of social work. The author analyzes the concepts of "professional development" and "social workers' professional development". It was found that the social workers' professional development is an important component of quality social work practice. Definitely, social workers' professional development in Canada is the responsibility of social work professional organizations, which are divided into 2 main types: professional (government regulators at the national level, colleges and associations at the provincial and territorial levels) and educational professional organizations. The content of the main legislative documents regulating the social workers' professional development is characterized. It was found that the basis of professional development is a program of continuous competence, which aims to promote the quality of professional activities in the field of social work and social services, as well as to encourage social workers-practitioners to constantly improve their professional skills and protect the public right to quality services as defined in the Model Social Work Practice Act, Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. The constructive ideas of the Canadian experience for reforming the Ukrainian system of social workers' professional development are characterized.

**Keywords:** social work; social worker; professional development; continuing professional development; social workers' professional development; Canada

## INTRODUCTION

Lifelong learning is an important component of human success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Creating opportunities for professional growth of a specialist's personality is a strategic task for each country and the world as a whole. Thus, in 2000, the European Council in Lisbon adopted the Memorandum of Lifelong Learning, which stated that lifelong learning should be the main political agenda of civil society, social cohesion and employment (Commission of the..., 2000). In particular, the professional growth of the individual is relevant with "people-person" professions, which implies their ability to function successfully in the system of interpersonal relations.

Social work refers to "people-person" professions and directly related to the constant interaction between social workers and persons in need. In addition, social work practice takes place against the background of rapid changes in the social, economic, political and cultural development of the country, accordingly, persons' problems and needs often change. Therefore, the ability to quickly adapt to new requirements, actual problems and needs and use modern tools of practice is important for a social worker-practitioner. So, education in the field of social work should not be a static, one-time experience of studying in Bachelor's and Master's educational programs. As the social landscape is constantly changing, it is extremely important for social workers practitioner to acquire modern knowledge, ideas and best practices, which necessitates continuing professional development, which is known to be a mandatory element of social workers' professional practice in developed countries (Nuttman-Shwartz, 2018).

The choice of the topic and, accordingly, the country for comparative and pedagogical research of this problem is due to the fact that Canada is a highly developed country in which the growth and progress of social work as a professional, scientific and educational activity is extremely important at the national level. According to Canadian Association for Social Work (2020) statistics, there are almost 50,000 social workers working in both public and private practice, more than 80 social worker educational programs, more than 30 national and provincial committees on social work and professional organizations in the field of social work and social education. The organization of social work practice, social workers' training and professional development in Canada operates in one interconnected system through a coordinated mechanism of all its actors. Canada has an effective and regular system of social workers' professional development, which is an important component of the social service system quality and the protection of its citizens from incompetence and unethical practices in the sphere of social work. Ukraine is on the way to forming an effective model of social work practice, professional standards, practice-oriented system of social workers' training and professional development. In this aspect, the need to identify and creatively use progressive and constructive ideas of Canadian

experience is important to modernize Ukrainian professional and educational practice in the sphere of social work.

The purpose of this article is to theoretically substantiate the basic principles of the system of social workers' professional development in Canada and identify opportunities for creative use of constructive ideas of the Canadian experience in Ukraine.

### BASIC RESEARCH TERMS

Analysis of the basic research term "professional development" showed that this concept is multifaceted and can be interpreted differently depending on the author's focus on the problem; if the study has a stable monodisciplinary basis (for example, studied within one discipline – sociology, organizational management, psychology, etc.); if it is interdisciplinary. We will focus on the fact that professional development is a process, in most cases continuous. Therefore, in the format of our research, the terms "professional development" and "continuing professional development" will be considered as related concepts.

In the scientific literature, professional development is considered as:

- "systematic organized process of employees' continuing professional training to prepare them for new functions and roles, professional development, formation of managers reserve and improving the staff social structure" (Danyuk, Petyukh, 2006, p. 148),
- "the process of continuing education and career training after a person has entered the workforce in order to help them develop new skills, stay up-to-date on current trends, and advance their career" (Rulev, Gutkevich, Mostenskaya, 2013),
- "the process of maintenance and enhancement of the knowledge, expertise and competence of professionals throughout their careers according to the plan formulated with regard to the needs of the professional, the employer, the profession and society" (Madden, Mitchel, 1993).

So, professional development is a process which is associated with a specific professional activity and is helpful to the individual specialist, employer and the state, as it is an indicator of the level of development for each person, organization and country.

Social work is known to be a dynamic sphere of professional activity, which is related with the human well-being in society and the societal well-being as a whole, the social worker's professional development is an integral condition for its achievement.

In the scientific literature, analysis of the term "social worker's professional development" is defined as conscious professional activity in the system of continuing education, aimed at improving the professional level of the specialist,

his professional self-realization, further development of professionally significant qualities. It includes four stages: awareness; definition of the program of self-improvement; search self-improvement; awareness and purposeful change of self.

The social worker's professional development cannot be a separate and unmanageable process. It should involve public and private sector organizations in the field of social work. In developed countries, authority for creating professional development conditions in the sphere of social work are divided between government agencies and professional organizations of state or public nature. However, the main role in the social workers' professional development is played by professional social work organizations, which aimed to maintain and develop quality standards of practice. **Social work professional organizations** defined the term "social worker's continuing professional development" or "social worker's professional development" in different ways.

Ireland's Multi-Profession Health Regulator (CORU, 2021) consider that continuing professional development is one of the key mechanisms used to foster high standards of professional conduct and professional education, training and competence among registrants.

Local Government Association in England (2021), which regulates social workers' professional activities, states in its documents that continuing professional development is the reflection and learning activity that social workers undertake throughout their career to maintain and improve their practice. It is an important part of a social worker's professional standards. By undertaking and recording continuing professional development, a social worker demonstrates to the public, their regulator and their employer that they uphold those professional standards. It is important that employers provide their social workers with time and opportunities to carry.

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW, 2021) views professional development as a systematic activity of a social worker to enhance their competence, including a range of formative practices such as self-analysis, training and certification based on ethics and standards of social work practice.

From these definitions we can conclude that the social worker's professional development is based on the basic principles of adult education, in particular on the principles of self-directing which means that adults are autonomous and self directing and they live under a large degree of self-governance, and to their own laws, beliefs and values; **learn by doing, which means their training and learning interventions must include active and practical participation and offer implementable techniques and methodologies that will immediately improve their every day lives; relevance to the adult learners, their lives and their business (they have to very clearly see why and how this is important to them personally and how it applies to their life; experience); all of the senses, that meet the needs of multi-sensory learning and teaching methodologies (audio, visual, reading/**

writing, kinaesthetic) and dependent and independent learning preferences; practice allows them to grow self-efficacy in new tasks that prepare them to act autonomously outside of the learning environment; personal development including intrinsic, personal desires and ambitions; involvement.

#### THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SOCIAL WORKERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN CANADA

The social workers' professional development in Canada is an integral part of quality professional social work practice, which has its own characteristics. Canada is a federation of ten provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Saskatchewan), and three territories (Northwest, Yukon, Nunavut), this country has totally decentralized systems of education and social work. Canada does not have a federal department of education and an integrated national education system. Within the federal system of shared authority, the Constitution of Canada Act of 1867 provides that in each province and for each territory, the legislature may produce only laws relating to education. The same applies to social work. Regulation of social work practice is carried out at the provincial/territorial levels.

Social workers' professional development in Canada is the responsibility of social work professional organizations, which are divided into 2 main types: professional and educational professional organizations. In turn, professional organizations are represented by government regulators at the national level, including the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB), the Canadian Board of Social Work Regulators (CCSWR) and the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASE). **At the provincial and territorial levels, the role of regulatory and professional organizations is played by colleges and associations, including the Alberta College of Social Workers, the Association of Social Workers of Northern Canada (ASWNC), British Columbia Association of Social Workers, Manitoba College of Social Workers, New Brunswick Association of Social Workers, New Foundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers, Nova Scotia Association of Social Workers, Prince Edward Island Association of Social Workers, Ontario Association of Social Workers, Professional Order of Social Workers of Quebec, Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers. Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) is an educational professional organization in the field of social work.**

Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) is the social work regulatory community, specifically ASWB members and governmental regulatory bodies responsible for ensuring the safe, competent, and ethical practice of social workers using digital and other electronic technology. Provides support and services to the

social work regulatory community to advance safe, competent, and ethical practices to strengthen public protection. ASWB's vision is that all social workers are licensed in order to protect clients and client systems. The organization authority includes developing and maintains the social work licensing examinations that are used to test a social worker's competence to practice ethically and safely; offers board training and support to social work regulatory boards; organization and licensing of professional activities in the field of social work; regulation of social work practice (About Us, 2021).

The Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators (CCSWR) is an organization that brings together provincial and territorial social work regulators, including professional social work organizations. The organization authority includes management of a national network of social work professional organizations, development of national standards for competence assessment in social work, development of national views on social work regulation, implementation of social work projects of national interest, cooperation with other national institutions and organizations (About Us, 2021).

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) is one of the world's first professional organizations in this field, founded in 1926 to monitor employment conditions and set standards of practice in the profession. It has an unofficial status of national voice and official member of the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW). The CASW consists of 10 provincial and 3 territorial partner organizations. Its mission is to promote the profession of social work in Canada and promote social justice. Activities of the organization provides influencing on Canadian social policy to be based on the principle of social justice, quality social services provision, and the system of social workers' professional development by creating a broad information base and tools for professional development. An important area of the organization's activity is participation in political coalitions and associated national committees in order to lobby the interests of the profession in the country and support special sectoral projects. To ensure the highest level of excellence in the profession, the CASW provides an assessment of the academic qualifications of social workers who are not educated in North America but wish to practice in Canada (About CASW, 2021).

The activities of provincial and territorial social work professional organizations are decentralized, but they clearly adhere to the chosen strategy in the standards of practice. The main activities of social work professional organizations and colleges are: protection of the social workers' and public interests; protection of public interests from unqualified, incompetent or unsuitable practitioners in the field of social work; support of competent and ethical social work practice, organization and control of the process of registering as a social worker and their compliance with professional standards; development of social workers' professional competence; regulation of professional behavior and discipline of its members,

students and professional corporations in accordance with the principles of self-regulation in the public interest; promoting and lobbying the interests of the public in order to achieve social justice and societal well-being; cooperation with other organizations to improve the prospects of social work; raising the prestige of the profession (Popova, 2021d).

The professional organizations cooperate and have a partnership with the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE). This organization is a leader in the system of vocational education and professional development of social workers in Canada. It cooperates with national and territorial professional organizations and governmental bodies of all provinces for the purpose of excellence in teaching, practice and research in social work. The main activities of the association are known to be: development of educational policy and social work standards; accreditation of social work educational programs; development and support of membership; holding an annual conference; publication of a scientific journal; promoting and supporting professional development in the workplace as a central component of social work education; providing critical analysis and social policy; conducting and supporting research and other scientific activities in the field of social work (About Us, 2021).

Thus, given the analysis of social work professional organizations we can conclude that their main task is to create conditions and opportunities for quality social work practice by developing regulations governing social work standards and its licensing, which are known to be a basis of social workers' professional development.

The need for social workers' professional development in Canada is defined in the Model Social Work Practice Act (2018), **which contains a number of recommendations** for the development of provincial and territorial laws. In particular, it states that any province or territory of Canada should strive for ideal social work practices based on the principle of community safety from incompetence, or unethical behavior of social workers.

An important addition to this document at the national level is the Code of Ethics (2005) developed by the Canadian Association of Social Workers that serves as the foundation for the Standards of Practice (1995) developed in each province in which it is determined that the belief in the client's right to have knowledgeable and skillful assistance provides the basis for the social worker's participation in continuing professional development (Stavkova, 2016). A commitment to continuing professional development is grounded in the ethical principle articulated in the Canadian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics,

Social workers respect a client's right to competent social worker services. Social workers analyze the nature of social needs and problems, and encourage innovative, effective strategies and techniques to meet both new and existing needs and, where possible, contribute to the knowledge

base of the profession. Social workers have a responsibility to maintain professional proficiency, to continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills, and to apply new knowledge in practice commensurate with their level of professional education, skill and competency, seeking consultation and supervision as appropriate. (Code of Ethics, 2005)

According to these and other (provincial/territorial) normative documents, social work professional organizations perform four main functions – regulatory, organizational and practical, controlling, advocacy (Popova, 2021b). The essence of the regulatory function is to establish requirements and procedures for the mandatory license of registered social workers (RSWs) who have official practice in the Canadian provinces; certification of educational programs that provide training for social workers. Organizational and practical function includes support for membership activities (conferences, provincial events) that promote qualified and ethical social work practices. The controlling function is aimed at verifying the professional competence of RSWs according to the Continuing Competence Program (CCP) (2018). The advocacy function aimed to protect the interests and rights of the **people from incompetence, or unethical behavior of social workers** and protect the rights of social workers by establishing a high professional image and status of the profession, creating conditions for continuing professional development and training by advocating progressive social policy, creating and participating in coalitions with government officials.

Implementation of these functions by professional organizations creates preconditions for social workers' continuing professional development in various fields of practice, as the opportunity to work in this specialty requires not only high-quality Bachelor's/Master's degree training in certified programs, but also official registration and annual monitoring of professional competence, which are the basis of professional development.

### CONTINUING COMPETENCE PROGRAM

The formal component of professional development is implemented through the annual mandatory participation of all registered and practicing social workers in the CCP (2018). This program is available in each of the 10 provinces and in each of Canada's 3 territories, officially approved by a college or professional association, and recognized as an official certification program for social workers (except those holding a retired class of certificate of registration). Because Canada's provinces and territories have a decentralized legal framework, the content of the CCP may vary slightly, depending on the specifics of each region. This approach provides its flexibility in accordance with the laws and social work practices (Popova, 2021a). In general, the main goal of the Program is to promote the quality of professional activities in the field of social work and social services,



as well as to encourage social workers-practitioners to constantly improve their professional skills and to protect the public's right to quality services as defined in the Model Social Work Practice Act, Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.

The Continuing Competence Program (2018) provides annual planned work on the individualized educational route of **professional development during every five years**. It is based on the portfolio model which calls for self-directed lifelong learning, which is best used as a basis for attempting to assure the continued competence of social work professionals. The portfolio method included six components: reflection and professional self-assessment; development of a learning plan; submission of the learning plan for verification; implementation of professional development; self-evaluation of learning plan outcomes; submission of portfolio or records of professional development activities according to Professional Development Credits (PDCF).

There are two options in completing reflection and self-assessment. The Competence Committee developed a self-assessment form to use during this step. Complete the self-assessment form as a guide in determining strengths and areas for growth. This option consists of four separate competency areas: organizational practice, professional practice, ethical practice, and self-care.

After completing the self-assessment form it is time to develop a learning plan that will help to build on particular strengths and to address identified areas for growth. Learning plan provides a particular competency (or area of competence) to enhance or a competency that requires maintenance; develop S.M.A.R.T. goals. Members can document outcomes from each activity on their learning plans. Evaluating how they influenced their current social work practice and future aspirations. Identifying those areas where work is still needed to reach specific goals. The last step in the program is reporting social work practice hours and continuing competence activities. There are two types of reporting: an annual online submission and the submission of a portfolio. Portfolios are randomly requested for audit by the ACSW and are not required by all members. These documents should provide written confirmation that the continuing competence requirements have been completed. Members are responsible to maintain a five-year Portfolio which can be requested for audit at any time with notice given six months prior to renewal.

Some provinces have additional program components, for example, in the province of Ontario, there is annually determined the list of information materials that are important for the social workers professional development (Popova, 2021c). In particular, in 2021, all social workers-practitioners had to get acquainted with information materials on the following topics: "Ethical and competent responses to anti-black racism", "They told me! Property of your professional responsibility", "Top 6 reflections on virtual services", "Reflections on the use of communication technologies in practice", "**Professional and Ethical: Communication Technology Practices and Policies for a Digital World**".

The curriculum should be developed in accordance with a special form and taking into account the continuing competency credit requirements (Table 1). There are four types of credits (one of which will only be visible to social workers assigned a clinical number): category A, category B, category C, clinical Supervision (only accessible to clinical social workers) (Continuing Competence Program, 2018). **Category A credits are generally activities that have clearly defined learning goals; things that should give you new material (or refresher on older material) that help you to meet the goals you have set for yourself as a social worker.** While these may be university or college courses, they may also be short (1 hour or more) workshops, training programs, conferences, seminars, or other types of events that meet your learning goals. Regularly, Category A credits are acquired from programs offered through accredited continuing education providers, such as colleges, universities, and similar professional organizations. Category B are activities normally associated with a particular job and are typically done during working hours. These are the things we all do on a daily basis that help us to remain competent in the work we do. Category C are the activities that you do for yourself. Self-care activities are aimed at things like maintaining your physical health, decreasing stress, increasing relaxation and equanimity, managing challenging emotional situations, fulfilling spiritual needs, etc.

Table 1. Continuing Competency Credit Requirements

Continuing Competency Credit Requirements	Structured Clinical Supervision	Category A 20 per activity	Category B 10 per activity	Category C 5 per activity	Total required
Registered Social Worker Full-time	N/A	Minimum 10	No Min or Max	No Min or Max	40
Registered Social Worker Part-Time	N/A	Minimum 5	No Min or Max	No Min or Max	20
Registered Social Worker Inactive (Not Practicing SW)	N/A	N/A	No Min or Max	No Min or Max	10 (recommended)
Clinical Social Worker Full-Time	Minimum 10	Minimum 20	No Min or Max	No Min or Max	50
Clinical Social Worker Part-Time	Minimum 5	Minimum 10	No Min or Max	No Min or Max	35
Clinical Social Worker Inactive	0	Minimum 20	No Min or Max	No Min or Max	20

Source: (Continuing Competence Program, 2018, p. 4).

The actual status of implementation of the Continuing Competence Program is reviewed annually by the relevant provincial or territorial committees of colleges or professional associations or after the completion of the program.

Continuing Competence Program is universal and takes into account all the differences of many areas of social work practice, which are recognized in each of the 10 provinces or 3 territories of Canada (Figure 1). It is based on a system of self-assessment and reflection on their own professional activities according to the compiled portfolio, which reflects the individual educational route of the social worker-practitioner, taking into account the set of his professional interests (McCauley, Matheson, 2018).

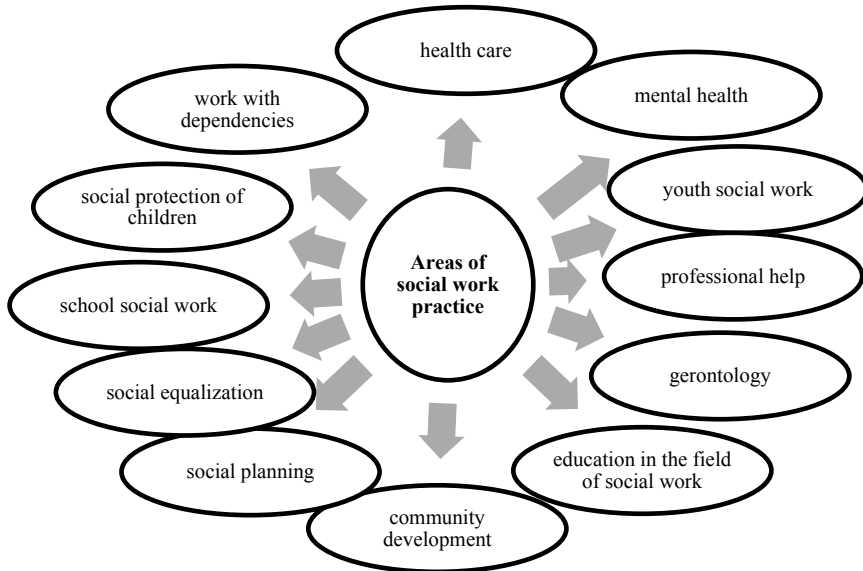


Figure 1. Areas of social work practice in Canada

Source: (Popova, 2021c, p. 70).

**Lifelong learning of social workers in Canada parallel with social work practice** is a guarantee of a quality system of social services, protection of human rights, social justice, social welfare and prestige of social worker profession. In this regard, it is appropriate to propose constructive ideas of Canadian practice for implementation in the Ukrainian system of social work at the national and local levels.

Note that in Ukraine, systematic work on the social workers' continuing professional development is not carried out. First, there is no legal framework in Ukraine to regulate the system of social workers' professional development. However, there is the Law of Ukraine "On the Professional Development of Employees" (2013), which defines the legal, organizational and financial principles of the professional development of employees in all industries. The provisions of this law on the need for training at least once every 5 years is irrelevant, especially for the social work practice, which is a dynamic profession in the era of digital

transformation and in the context reforming social services system in Ukraine. In addition, neither the standards of practice in this area nor the ethical standards of social workers have been approved at the legislative level, which has a negative impact on social work practice and its quality. There are no governmental and public professional organizations in the sphere of social work that would be responsible for social work practice, development of standards, etc.

Therefore, taking into account the experience of Canada, there is a need to create social work professional associations in Ukraine that will have an official status from international professional organizations; **establishment of governmental regulatory bodies in the sphere of social work; development of the Code of Ethics for social worker and standards of social work practice; development of national strategy and model of the system of social workers' continuing professional development; improving legislative and regulatory documents in the sphere of social education and social practice.** At the local level, it is necessary to develop programs of continuing competence, taking into account the specifics of educational and social opportunities in the region; ensuring interaction between different types of educational and social institutions.

## CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the social workers' continuing professional development in Canada is an important element of the quality of social work practice, which ensures the inextricable link between modern science and social work practice. It is known to be implemented through participation in the Continuing Competence Program. The need and obligation for the social workers' professional development in Canada is defined by the Code of Ethics and the Standards of Practice, the theses of which are the basis for the dynamic change of the social landscape. Responsibility for professional development is assigned to **social work professional organizations according to 4 main goals: regulatory, organizational-practical, controlling, advocacy.**

This systematic approach to the social workers' continuing professional development enables every Canadian citizen to exercise the right to quality social services, adhere to ethical and professional standards, promote innovative and effective professional strategies and methods to meet both new and existing client needs, **to achieve a high level of social justice and societal well-being. In this context, the study will help to create a Ukrainian system of social workers' continuing professional development.**

The article does not cover all aspects of research on this issue. We see prospects for further research in a detailed study of effective forms, methods and tools for social workers' professional development in Canada in order to identify progressive and constructive ideas of the Canadian experience and its implementation in Ukrainian practice.

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## ABSTRAKT

W artykule opisane zostały podstawowe zasady rozwoju zawodowego pracowników socjalnych w Kanadzie oraz wskazano możliwości wykorzystania jej konstruktywnych pomysłów w ukraińskiej praktyce pracy socjalnej. Autorka analizuje terminy „rozwój zawodowy” i „rozwój zawodowy pracownika socjalnego”. Stwierdzono, że rozwój zawodowy pracowników socjalnych jest ważnym elementem wysokiej jakości praktyki pracy socjalnej. Zdecydowanie za rozwój zawodowy pracowników socjalnych w Kanadzie odpowiadają organizacje zawodowe pracy socjalnej, które dzielą się na dwa główne typy: zawodowe (regulatory rządowe na poziomie krajowym, uczelnie i stowarzyszenia na poziomie prowincji i terytoriów) oraz zawodowe edukacyjne. Scharakteryzowano treść głównych dokumentów legislacyjnych regulujących rozwój zawodowy pracowników socjalnych. Stwierdzono, że podstawą rozwoju zawodowego jest program ciągłych kompetencji, którego celem jest promowanie jakości działań zawodowych w zakresie pracy socjalnej i usług socjalnych, a także zachęcanie pracowników socjalnych-praktyków do stałego podnoszenia swoich umiejętności zawodowych oraz ochrona prawa społeczeństwa do usług wysokiej jakości, zgodnie z definicją zamieszczoną w ustawie o modelowych praktykach pracy socjalnej, Kodeksie etyki i Standardach postępowania. Scharakteryzowano konstruktywne pomysły kanadyjskiego doświadczenia na reformę ukraińskiego systemu rozwoju zawodowego pracowników socjalnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** praca socjalna; pracownik socjalny; rozwój zawodowy; ustawiczny rozwój zawodowy; rozwój zawodowy pracowników socjalnych; Kanada