



Privacy Policy

Effective Date: May 20, 2026

Alula Counselling & Wellness (“we,” “us,” “our,” or “the practice”) is committed to protecting the privacy of the personal information and personal health information we collect, use, and disclose in the course of providing psychotherapy and counselling services. This Policy explains how we handle that information and the rights you have regarding it.

Because we provide health care services in Ontario, our primary legal obligations arise under Ontario’s Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004 (PHIPA). Where PHIPA does not apply — for example, to certain administrative or non-health personal information, or information that crosses provincial or national borders — the federal Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) may also apply. We comply with both where relevant, and with the standards set by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW).

1. Accountability

Alula Counselling & Wellness is responsible for the personal health information under our custody and control. Our Clinical Director, Hoi Yee Mak, RSW, is accountable for our compliance with PHIPA, PIPEDA (where applicable), and this Policy, and is our designated contact for privacy questions and complaints.

Where we engage third parties (such as our practice management software, payment processing, or documentation tools) to collect, store, or process personal health information on our behalf, we take reasonable steps to ensure those parties protect the information to a standard comparable to or exceeding our own, and we remain accountable for information in their custody.

2. What We Collect and Why

We collect personal information and personal health information necessary to provide safe, appropriate care, including:

- Contact and identifying information (name, address, phone, email, date of birth)
- Emergency contact information
- Health history, presenting concerns, diagnoses (where applicable), and treatment records
- Session notes, assessments, and clinical documentation
- Billing and payment information
- Information you choose to share for the purpose of coordinating care with other providers, insurers, or third parties, where you have consented to that disclosure

We collect this information directly from you wherever possible, and only what is reasonably necessary to assess, treat, and support you, or as required by our regulatory or legal obligations.

3. Consent

We obtain your consent before collecting, using, or disclosing your personal health information, except where the law permits or requires us to act without consent (for example, mandatory reporting obligations, or a valid court order — see Section 6, “Limits to Confidentiality”).

Consent may be express (given clearly, in writing or verbally) or, in narrow and limited circumstances permitted under PHIPA, implied by the circumstances — for example, sharing basic information with another member of your care team who is directly involved in your treatment. We rely on implied consent only where PHIPA permits it, and we default to express, informed consent wherever practical.

You may withdraw or place conditions on your consent to future collection, use, or disclosure of your information at any time by notifying your therapist, subject to legal or contractual restrictions and reasonable notice.

Where you are a minor, consent operates as described in your Consent to Treatment form: your capacity to consent to your own care is based on your ability to understand and appreciate the treatment, not solely on your age, consistent with Ontario’s Health Care Consent Act.

4. Limiting Collection

We collect only the personal health information necessary for the purposes identified in this Policy and in your consent forms. We do not collect information by unfair or misleading means, and we communicate our collection practices clearly to clients at intake.

5. Limiting Use, Disclosure, and Retention

We use and disclose your personal health information only for the purposes for which it was collected, unless you consent to a new purpose or disclosure is otherwise permitted or required by law.

Retention: We retain client records for a minimum of ten (10) years from the date of your last contact with us, or, if you were under 18 years of age at your last contact, for ten (10) years from the date you turned (or would have turned) 18 — consistent with OCSWSSW record-keeping standards. Records may be retained longer where required by law, by our professional liability insurer, or where we reasonably believe continued retention may be necessary (for example, in connection with a minor client, a matter involving abuse, or ongoing or anticipated litigation).

When personal health information is no longer required, we securely destroy, erase, or anonymize it.

6. Limits to Confidentiality

We hold your personal health information in strict confidence. There are, however, circumstances in which we are permitted or required by law to disclose information without your consent, including:

- Where there is a risk of serious harm to you or another identifiable person, in which case we may notify appropriate individuals (e.g., police, a physician, an emergency contact, or a guardian)
- Where we have reasonable grounds to suspect a child is or may be in need of protection, in which case we are required to report to a Children’s Aid Society
- Where required to report a regulated health professional suspected of sexually abusing a client
- Where we are served with a valid court order, subpoena, or other legal process compelling disclosure
- Where necessary for us to seek clinical supervision or consultation regarding your care
- Where necessary to respond to a complaint, audit, or investigation by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW)

- Where necessary to disclose information to our professional liability insurer in connection with an actual or potential claim
- Where required under the Coroners Act in the event of a client's death

Except where disclosure is required by law, we will make reasonable efforts to inform you of these limits before you begin services, and to seek your consent before any disclosure that is not otherwise mandated.

7. Accuracy

We take reasonable steps to ensure your personal health information is as accurate, complete, and up to date as necessary for the purposes for which it is used. If you identify an error or omission in your record, we will correct or amend it in accordance with Section 9 below, and, where appropriate and with your consent, notify any third parties who received the incorrect information.

8. Safeguards

We protect your personal health information using safeguards appropriate to its sensitivity, including:

- Physical safeguards: locked filing areas and restricted access to any paper records
- Technical safeguards: password-protected and encrypted electronic records, secure cloud-based practice management and documentation systems, and encrypted transmission of information where technically supported
- Administrative safeguards: role-based access limited to personnel with a legitimate need to know, confidentiality training for any staff or contractors, and due diligence on third-party service providers before adopting them into our practice

Data storage location: Client records and communications are stored with service providers whose infrastructure is located in Canada, and which are contractually or by policy required to handle information in a manner consistent with Canadian privacy law. Where any service involves limited, temporary technical processing outside Canada (for example, transient processing incidental to transcription services), we take reasonable steps to ensure that processing does not compromise the confidentiality of your information, and we disclose the specific tools involved (see Section 10).

9. Individual Access and Correction

Upon request, we will inform you of the existence, use, and disclosure of your personal health information, and provide you with reasonable access to your record, subject to the exceptions below. You may request correction of information you believe is inaccurate or incomplete; where we do not agree a correction is warranted, we will attach a statement of disagreement to your file at your request, consistent with PHIPA.

We may deny or limit access to a record, or a portion of it, only where permitted or required by law, including where:

- Disclosure could reasonably be expected to result in a risk of serious harm to your treatment, recovery, or safety, or that of another person
- The information is subject to legal privilege (e.g., solicitor-client privilege)
- The information was collected or created primarily in anticipation of, or for use in, a legal proceeding, and the proceeding has not concluded
- Granting access would reveal personal health information about another individual
- Another legal exception applies

Where we deny access, we will explain the reason and your options for recourse, including your right to make a complaint to the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario.

Where a client is a minor, a parent or legal guardian with authority to make health care decisions on the child's behalf may generally exercise access and correction rights on the child's behalf, except where the child has the capacity to make their own decisions about their personal health information, or where disclosure to a parent/guardian is otherwise restricted — consistent with the Minor's Capacity to Consent provisions in our Consent to Treatment form.

10. Third-Party Service Providers

We use the following categories of third-party service providers in the course of delivering care. We select providers that represent PHIPA/PIPEDA-consistent privacy and security practices, and we review these tools periodically.

- Practice management and scheduling: Jane App, used for booking, intake forms, and secure messaging.
- AI-assisted clinical documentation: Klarify, an AI note-taking assistant that may be used, with your separate consent, to record or transcribe sessions for the purpose of preparing clinical notes. Klarify's privacy practices are described to you, and your consent is obtained, in your Consent to Treatment form. Information processed by Klarify is not used to train AI models and is not sold or shared with third parties for unrelated purposes.
- Payment processing: e-transfer, processed through our financial institution.

We will update this section if we adopt additional tools that involve the collection, use, storage, or disclosure of your personal health information, and, where required, obtain your consent before doing so.

11. Breach Notification

If we become aware of a privacy breach involving your personal health information that creates a real risk of significant harm, we will notify you as required by PHIPA, take reasonable steps to contain and investigate the breach, and, where required by law, notify the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario.

12. Openness

We make this Policy available to all clients at intake and upon request, and we are happy to answer questions about how we manage personal health information at any time.

13. Questions, Concerns, and Complaints

If you have questions about our privacy practices, or wish to make a complaint, please contact:

Alula Counselling & Wellness

Clinical Director: Hoi Yee Mak, RSW

Suite 1400, 18 King Street East, Toronto, ON M5C 1C4

Tel: 437-447-5200

Email: cherie@alulacounselling.ca

We investigate all privacy complaints promptly and will respond within 30 days, outlining the actions taken or our reasons for declining to act.

If we are unable to resolve your concern, you may escalate it to either or both of the following:

For concerns about the conduct of your therapist as a regulated professional:

The Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

250 Bloor Street East, Suite 1000, Toronto, Ontario M4W 1E6

Tel: (416) 972-9882 | Fax: (416) 972-1512 | Web: www.ocswssw.org

For concerns about the handling of your personal health information under PHIPA:

Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario (IPC)

2 Bloor Street East, Suite 1400, Toronto, Ontario M4W 1A8

Tel: 1-800-387-0073 | Web: www.ipc.on.ca

Your privacy is critically important to us.

Thank you for taking the time to read our Privacy Policy. You will be asked to acknowledge this Policy in your intake form, and your therapist will review it with you in your first session.