

# Psychologists in health care in the Netherlands:

- health care psychologist
- psychotherapist
- clinical psychologist
- clinical neuropsychologist

FGZPt

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# Introduction

This brochure has been written for people with a foreign background who wish to know more about the training and registration system for psychologists in the health care sector in the Netherlands. This information is of particular interest for foreign employers of Dutch psychologists, psychologists with a foreign professional qualification who wish to work in the Netherlands, and foreign organisations with an interest in the Dutch system.

This brochure provides information on the psychological professions in health care as they are organised in the Individual Health Care Professions Act, or the BIG Act (Dutch: Wet op de Beroepen in de Individuele Gezondheidszorg). This Act provides a system of title protection to monitor and improve the quality of health care.

The BIG Act discriminates four psychological professions: health care psychologist, psychotherapist, clinical psychologist and clinical neuropsychologist. In addition to these four professions, there are other professionals who have also provided mental health care in the Netherlands for many years now. Examples are: psychiatrists, people whose sole qualification is a master's degree in psychology, people whose sole qualification is from a non-university institution, and nurses. This brochure limits itself to the four psychological professions as recognised by the BIG Act, as this is the largest group of psychologists working in the Dutch health care sector.

The first chapter discusses the BIG Act's methodology. In Chapters 2 and 3, a more in-depth analysis is given of the basic professions of health care psychologist and psychotherapist. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 deal with the specializations within the health care psychologist profession: clinical psychology and clinical neuropsychology. Chapter 7 summarises the most important characteristics of the four psychological professions as recognised by the BIG Act. This chapter also provides contact details of a number of relevant organisations.

## Chapter 1 The BIG Act

The BIG Act (Individual Health Care Professions Act) was introduced in the Netherlands in the 1990s and its arrival meant the creation of a single framework for all health care professions.

The objectives central to the BIG Act are (1) to enhance the quality of health care and (2) to protect the patient from professionals acting incompetently and carelessly. Instead of regulation of the actual professions, a system of title protection was decided upon to realise these objectives. Article 3 of the BIG Act contains a list of the titles of eight professions. Only those persons who meet the expertise requirements relating to a specific profession will be permitted to carry the title of the profession in question. Wrongful use of one of these titles could lead to an administrative penalty of several of thousands of euros.

### Basic profession and specializations

The professions listed in Article 3 of the BIG Act are the so-called basic professions. These are: health care psychologist, psychotherapist, physician, nurse, dentist, pharmacist, midwife and physiotherapist.

Moreover, the BIG Act has the added strength in that it introduces specialist professional titles.

### Title protection

As mentioned above, the cornerstone of the BIG Act is the protection of a number of professional titles. In the case of psychologists, this means ‘health care psychologist’ and ‘psychotherapist’ are protected titles. Within health care psychology there are two further specialist professions: ‘clinical psychologist’ and ‘clinical neuropsychologist’. These are also protected titles. There are no specializations within the psychotherapist profession.

## Registration

A professional is only allowed to use a title under the BIG Act if s/he is registered on the 'BIG' register.

Registration as a health care psychologist or as a psychotherapist on the BIG register will be effected after submission of evidence of the relevant diploma or degree. Registration involves costs.

The BIG register is available to the public for inspection, which means that anyone can consult it to check whether someone is registered.

The BIG register for basic professions is managed by the Central Information Unit on Health Care Professions (the CIBG) in The Hague. This agency implements the BIG ACT on behalf of the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.

## Re-registration

Registration is valid for a period of five years. As of 1 January 2012, health care psychologists and psychotherapists have been obliged to renew their registration every five years. Re-registration is dependent on practitioners demonstrating work experience of at least 3,120 hours during the preceding five year-period. If practitioners cannot provide proof of sufficient work experience, they must undertake supplementary training.

## Disciplinary law

Apart from these expertise regulations in the form of title protection and registration, professionals are subject to a retrospective assessment in the form of statutory medical disciplinary law. Clients who encounter difficulties with the conduct of a professional can lodge a complaint. The disciplinary proceedings are also described in the BIG Act.

A justified complaint about the way a person has practised his or her profession may lead to removal from the register or to other measures such as a warning or a penalty. One of the five regional medical disciplinary tribunals in the Netherlands will handle the complaint, and, on appeal, the complaints will be considered by the Central Medical Disciplinary Tribunal in The Hague.

Disciplinary measures will be recorded in the BIG register.

## Legal protection

The CIBG, the register for the basic professions, holds a public office laid down in the BIG Act.

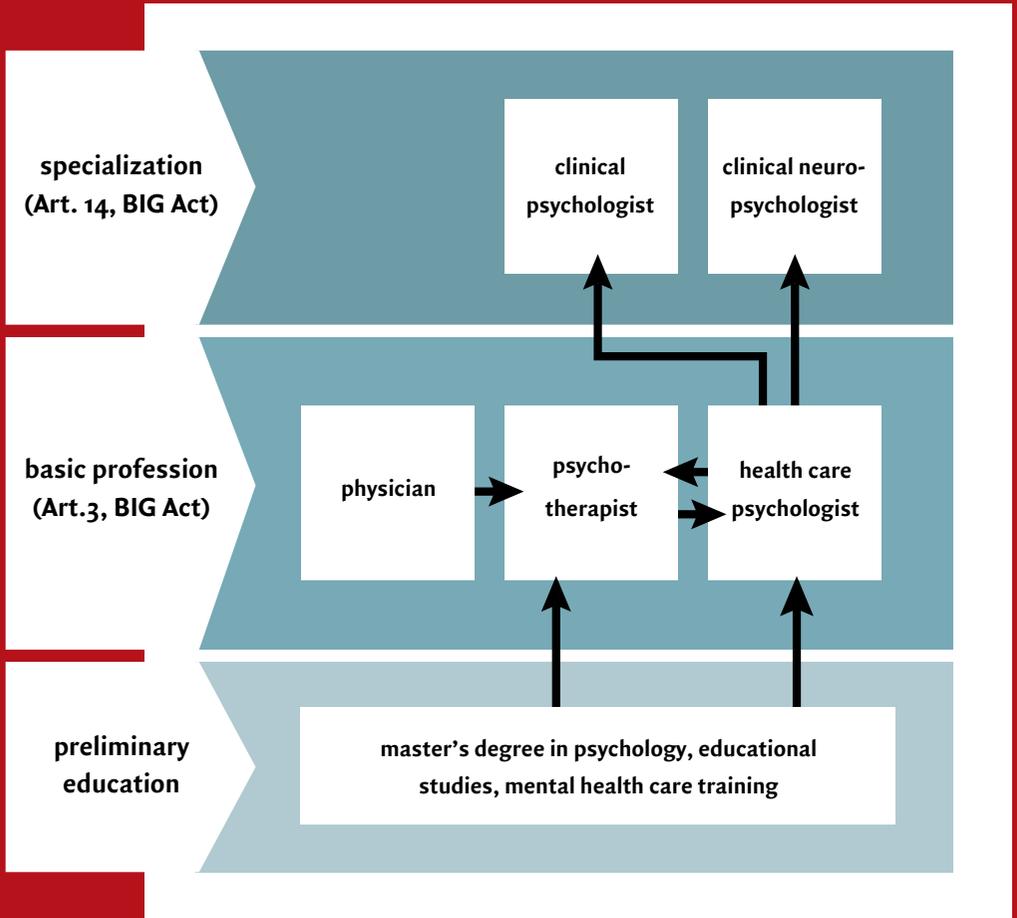
Public law states that any affected party may lodge an objection to the decisions of the CIBG. There is an advisory committee which deals with the objections: this committee advises the CIBG on the settlement of the objections. If any affected party should disagree with the manner in which their complaint has been handled, they may then take the matter to the administrative court for adjudication. Any court decision is binding.

## Recognition of professional qualifications from another country

Psychologists with professional experience acquired abroad may request recognition of their (foreign) professional qualification.

The recognition procedure comprises a general knowledge and skills test (AKV) and a professional knowledge test. The AKV test assesses knowledge of the English and the Dutch languages, the Dutch health care system, and whether the applicant's information computing technology (ICT) skills are sufficient. The professional knowledge test is used to assess the applicant's diplomas/degrees and their professional and practical experience.

The professional knowledge test is executed by the Committee for Foreign Health Care Graduates (CBGV). The Committee advises the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport on these requests for recognition. Essential differences may be compensated by an internship to accommodate the requirements or with a test of competences. After recognition the applicant will be registered on the BIG register.



## Chapter 2 Health care psychologist

The health care psychologist profession has been recognised by law as a basic profession since 1998.

The health care psychologist is a generalist. S/he treats psychological disorders, problems in a person's private life and psychological complaints that may occur in combination with other diseases such as disability and physical complaints.

The main tasks of a health care psychologist are independent diagnosis, care needs assessment, and treatment.

A health care psychologist often works in mental health care, in nursing homes or in a general hospital. Health care psychologists may work in independent practices, for example as a psychologist providing primary or basic health care.

The health care psychologist works in close cooperation with people in other disciplines, such as physicians, but retains responsibility for his or her own practice.

### Eligibility for enrolment in health care psychology training programmes

With a university master's degree in psychology you can enrol in a health care post-master training programme. Other university masters degrees that would allow access to this post-master programme are educational studies and mental health care training. Moreover, the masters programme must include certain topics to meet the requirements for pre-training. This is assessed nation-wide.

### Health care psychologist study programme

The post-master study programme for health care psychologist consists of an academic course component and a practical component. The study programme is organised by regionally divided training institutions in the Netherlands. These are independent institutions, specifically intended for psychological professional training in health care, that work in close cooperation with the Dutch universities and with hundreds of practical training institutions. Chapter 7 lists the contact details of these regional training institutions.

Every year, approximately 750 students enter study programmes to be trained as health care psychologists. Basically, each programme lasts two years (810 hours theoretical and practical education – including 90 hours of supervision – and 2,790 hours of work experience). A part-time alternative is also possible.

The trainee's training is managed by a director of residency. During both the academic and the practical parts of the study programme, trainees study diagnosis, care needs assessment, treatment and other duties. Academic training takes place on one fixed day of the week at the academic training institution. Most of the rest of the week (for a full time student) would be spent in gaining practical experience. Students acquire their work experience under the supervision of a placement or practicum supervisor. The practical training institution and the practicum supervisor must be approved by the director of residency.

To be able to meet the required number of hours of practical training, trainees must sign a placement contract with the practical training institution.

There are two differentiations within the health care psychologist training: Adults & Older Adults and Children & Youth.

## Costs

The practical training institution pays for the practical component of the training. The costs of the academic course component in 2013 amounted to approximately €17,500, excluding text books and reference literature. The costs are usually borne by the health care psychologist in training. In some cases these costs can also be borne, in part or in full, by the practical training institution.

There were approximately 15,000 health care psychologists in the Netherlands in 2013.

## Chapter 3 Psychotherapist

The profession of psychotherapist has been recognised by law as a basic profession since 1998.

The psychotherapist focuses on the treatment of patients with complex psychological problems. Psychotherapists commonly assess and treat patients presenting with multiple problems, personality problems, or a combination of the two. In order to be able to formulate a diagnosis and assess the patient's care needs, the psychotherapist needs to have expert abilities in the interpretation of many sources of information. Additionally, s/he must be capable of building a therapeutic relationship with the patient and carrying out complex methods of treatment. Essentially, they are specialised in high level counselling skills. The psychotherapist is an independent professional who carries out treatments independently or in close cooperation with another discipline. Psychotherapists may work in mental health care institutions, but also in private practice.

### Eligibility for enrolment in psychotherapy training programmes

With a university master's degree in psychology you can enrol in a psychotherapist post-master programme. Other university master's degrees that would allow access to these post-masters programmes are educational studies, mental health care, and medicine. Moreover, the masters programme must include certain subjects to meet the requirements for pre-training. This is assessed nation-wide.

### Psychotherapist training

The post-masters study programme for psychotherapists consists of an academic course component and a practical component and is organised by the regional training institution that also offers the study programme for health care psychologists. See Chapter 7 for the contact information of Dutch training institutions.

Every year approximately 175 students enter such study programmes. The study load comprises 1,280 hours of academic and practical education (including 150 hours of supervision, 50 hours of personal psychotherapy and 2,400 hours of work experience). The overall study load (3,680 hours) is approximately equal to the study load for health care psychologists (3,600 hours).

The trainee's training is managed by a director of residency. There is a 3-year and a 4-year variant. The 3-year variant is meant for health care psychologists who wish to become psychotherapists. This group may be exempt from part of the study programme for psychotherapists. The 4-year variant is meant for all other participants.

Academic training takes place at the academic training institution. Most of the rest of the week would be spent in gaining practical experience. Students acquire their work experience under the supervision of a placement or practicum coordinator. The practical training institution and the practicum supervisor must be approved by the director of residency.

To be able to meet the required number of hours of practical training, trainees must sign a placement contract with the practical training institution. There are two differentiations within psychotherapist training: Adults & Older Adults, and Children & Youth.

## Costs

The practical training institution pays for the practical component of the training. In 2013, the costs of the academic course component amounted to approximately €24,000, excluding text books and reference literature and excluding personal psychotherapy. These costs are usually borne by the psychotherapist in training. In some cases these costs can also be borne, in part or in full, by the practical training institution.

There were approximately 7,000 psychotherapists in the Netherlands in 2013.

## Chapter 4 Specializations

Apart from the basic professions, the BIG Act offers the possibility to specialise. This is laid down in Article 14 of the BIG Act. Specializations are subareas within a basic profession, which require a specific type of expertise.

Specialist titles may be put forward for recognition by law. Such an application must be submitted to an occupational group at the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. If the Minister considers the creation of a certain specialty desirable to promote the proper practice of health care, s/he can legally recognise the professional title of such a specialization.

The Netherlands currently has two such specializations within health care psychology that are recognised by the Minister. These are clinical psychologist and clinical neuropsychologist. The psychotherapist profession has no recognised specializations.

### Title protection

Recognition of a specialty by the Minister means that the use of the title is preserved for those persons registered on the specialist register.

### Relation between basic profession and specialty

Registers also exist for specialists. These registers are also available to the public for inspection. Unlike the registers for the basic professions, however, the specialist registers are managed by the occupational group itself. For health care psychologists this is the FGzPt (Federation for Health care Psychologists and Psychotherapists), an association with three members: NIP (Dutch Association of Psychologists), NVO (Association of pedagogics in the Netherlands) and NVP (Dutch Association of Psychotherapists) (since July 4, 2014). The actual register holder for specialists is the RSG (Health Care Psychologist Specializations Registration Committee), which forms part of the FGzPt.

When the decision has been made to enter a person on the specialist register, the CIBG enters his or her specialty or specializations on the BIG register of health care psychologists.

### Registration

It is only possible to be registered as a clinical psychologist or a clinical neuropsychologist when an applicant is in possession of a Dutch diploma from a training institution, or with a recognised foreign professional qualification for the relevant specialty.

Registration will take place by filing a request with the RSG. Registration as a specialist involves costs.

### Re-registration

Registration is valid for a period of five years. After this period expires each specialist must file a request for re-registration with the RSG. The requirements for re-registration for clinical psychologists and for clinical neuropsychologists are the same. Both specialists must have 4,160 hours of relevant work experience and must be able to demonstrate that they are in possession of 200 hours of continuing professional development in the area of their specialty in order to be registered for another five-year period.

Specialists do not need to apply for re-registration as health care psychologists. If they are eligible for re-registration as specialists, they will automatically be re-registered for the basic profession of health care psychologist.

### Re-entry

If a specialist fails to request his or her re-registration, or if s/he does not meet the requirements for re-registration, his/her registration will expire after five years. However, some former specialists may wish to be registered as specialists after an interval of non-registration. The re-entry procedure is designed for this purpose.

A request must be filed with the RSG. The applicant for re-entry must meet the requirements of re-registration, calculated over the period from 'the last date of registration' to the date of the request for re-entry. If the applicant does not meet these requirements, the RSG may impose an individual study programme.

### Disciplinary law and legal protection

Disciplinary law applies to the conduct of specialists, as it does to the basic professions. Disciplinary proceedings will appear before the regional medical disciplinary tribunal and the Central Medical Disciplinary Tribunal in The Hague. The RSG has a public duty. This means that public law applies to RSG decisions to register specialists and to any other decision in connection with registration. Affected parties may object to RSG decisions through the RSG advisory committee and appeal to the Dutch administrative court.

### Recognition of specialist professional qualifications from another country

Psychologists with professional experience acquired abroad, who believe they might be eligible for registration as a clinical psychologist or clinical neuropsychologist may request recognition of their (foreign) professional qualification from the RSG.

They will only be eligible if they have first qualified for the basic profession of health care psychologist. Subsequently, the RSG will assess the applicant's professional experience for the specialization in question. Essential differences may be compensated by an adaptation internship or with a competence test. After recognition, the applicant will be listed on the specialist register.

## Chapter 5 Clinical psychologist

The title of clinical psychologist has been recognised since 2005.

A clinical psychologist is specialised in diagnosing and treating persons with complex psychological and/or psychosomatic problems. These include persons with psychological conditions in combination with complex personality disorders, with serious physical illnesses or with complicated psychosocial problems such as poverty and social isolation. A clinical psychologist will often treat patients for whom standard treatments fail.

Furthermore, the clinical psychologist is trained to carry out scientific research and health care management. S/he is capable of developing or supervising scientific research that informs practice and translating published evidence into clinical practice. S/he has managerial, policy-related and organisational skills and has the skills needed to undertake a supervisory role in health care.

There are more than 2,000 clinical psychologists in the Netherlands. Usually, they work for mental health care institutions and in hospitals. In addition, clinical psychologists can be found in specialised youth treatment centres, specialist health care institutions, rehabilitation institutions, universities and forensic hospitals.

An estimated quarter of clinical psychologists work in private practice, sometimes in combination with a position in an institution.

Each clinical psychologist is also fully trained as a psychotherapist and after certification as a clinical psychologist may file a request with the CIBG for registration as a psychotherapist.

## Training

The study programme for clinical psychologist takes four years and is open to registered health care psychologists. The programme's structure is the same as the study programme for health care psychologist: a combination of practical and theoretical training.

The trainee's training is managed by a director of residency, who must be recognised as such by the RSG. S/he must also be a professor or a senior university lecturer. Theoretical training takes place during two consecutive days a week, once every four weeks. Three days a week (for a full time student) would be spent in gaining practical experience. Students acquire their work experience under the supervision of a practicum supervisor. The practical training institution and the practicum supervisor must be approved by the director of residency. The study programme for clinical psychologist is organised by the regional training institutions that also offer the study programme for health care psychologists and psychotherapists.

To be able to meet the required number of hours of practical training, trainees must sign a placement contract with the practical training institution. There are two differentiations within the clinical psychologist training programme: Adults & Older Adults, and Children & Youth.

## Costs

Every year, approximately 100 health care psychologists enter a study programme to be trained as a clinical psychologist. The practical training institution pays for the practical component of the training. In 2013, the costs of the academic course component amounted to approximately €25,000, excluding text books and reference literature and excluding personal psychotherapy. These costs are usually borne by the health care psychologist in training to become a specialist.

## Chapter 6 Clinical neuropsychologist

The title of clinical psychologist has been legally recognised since 2008.

A clinical neuropsychologist is specialised in conditions of the brain and the consequences of these for cognition, emotions and behaviour. These include degenerative diseases such as dementia or Parkinson's disease and acquired brain injuries e.g. due to accidents or brain haemorrhages. The clinical neuropsychologist's job includes diagnosis, provision of information, counselling and treatment.

There are approximately 120 clinical neuropsychologists in the Netherlands.

They work in mental health care institutions and in hospitals, but they can also be found in specialised youth treatment centres, specialised neuropsychological wards, rehabilitation institutions and forensic hospitals. In addition to direct patient care, the clinical neuropsychologist also performs many other functions. Like the clinical psychologist, s/he is a scientist practitioner, whose role is to build a bridge between science and practice. The execution and management of scientific research often falls within the sphere of the clinical neuropsychologist's activities. In addition, s/he is capable of holding a managerial position in health care.

### Training

The study programme for clinical neuropsychologist takes four years and is open to registered health care psychologists.

The programme's structure is the same as the study programme for health care psychologist and clinical psychologist: a combination of practical and theoretical training.

The study programme for clinical neuropsychologist is organised by the PaON foundation (Post-academic Training in Clinical Neuropsychology) in Utrecht.

The trainee's training is managed by a director of residency, who must be recognised as such by the RSG. S/he must also be a professor or a senior university lecturer.

Theoretical training takes place during two consecutive days a week, once every four weeks. On average, three days a week (for a full time student) would be spent in gaining practical experience. Students acquire their work experience under the supervision of a practicum supervisor. The practical training institution and the practicum supervisor must be approved by the director of residency. To be able to meet the required number of hours of practical training, trainees must sign a placement contract with the practical training institution.

### Costs

The capacity of the clinical neuropsychologist training programme is limited. The practical training institution pays for the practical component of the training. In 2013, the costs of the academic course component amounted to approximately €30,000 excluding text books and reference literature. These costs are usually borne by the health care psychologist in training to become a specialist.

## Chapter 7 Summary

### Overlap between the four psychological professions as recognised by the BIG Act

In the chapters above an attempt has been made to explain the BIG Act's methodology and to provide an insight into the differences between the four psychological professions.

However, there is considerable overlap between the four professions. Therefore, many psychologists with a BIG registration hold one or more registrations for the three other professions as well. For example, almost half of all health care psychologists are also registered as psychotherapists, and about a quarter of all psychotherapists are also registered as clinical psychologists.

These similarities are not helpful in making the professional structure more transparent. This sometimes leads to confusion among outsiders: what exactly distinguishes a health care psychologist from a psychotherapist? And what is the difference between a clinical psychologist and a psychotherapist?

The summary below outlines the key features of the core competencies of the four professions in an attempt to provide more transparency:

- a health care psychologist: is trained in diagnosis of commonly occurring psychological conditions, and main stream psychological treatments, including psychotherapeutic techniques (such as CBT, behavioural therapy, and counselling);
- a psychotherapist: is trained to a limited extent in diagnosis of psychological conditions, but their training focuses on in depth counselling and psychotherapy skills;
- a clinical psychologist: is a health care psychologist with additional training in the diagnosis of complex psychological conditions (such as personality disorder, PTSD or addiction) and full training in psychotherapy. They must also conduct a research study of publishable quality and they are trained extensively in health care management;

- a clinical neuropsychologist: is a health care psychologist with supplementary training in the diagnosis of complex psychological conditions and the treatment of cognitive and psychological consequences of conditions of the brain. Like clinical psychologists, they must also conduct a research study of publishable quality and they are trained extensively in health care management. A clinical neuropsychologist can not be registered as a psychotherapist.

### In conclusion, would you like to receive more information?

More information on the BIG Act and the training programmes for and registration of health care psychologists, psychotherapists, clinical psychologists and clinical neuropsychologists can be obtained from the following institutes:

- CIBG (including CBGV): [www.bigregister.nl](http://www.bigregister.nl) and [www.bigregister.nl/en](http://www.bigregister.nl/en) (English);
- FGzPt (Federation for Health care Psychologists and Psychotherapists): [www.fgzp.nl](http://www.fgzp.nl);
- Health care Inspectorate: [www.igz.nl](http://www.igz.nl);
- NIP (Dutch Association of Psychologists): [www.psynip.nl](http://www.psynip.nl);
- NVGzP (Dutch Association for Health care Psychology and its Specializations): [www.nvgzp.nl](http://www.nvgzp.nl);
- NVO (Association of Educationalists in the Netherlands): [www.nvo.nl](http://www.nvo.nl);
- NVP (Dutch Association for Psychotherapy): [www.psychotherapie.nl](http://www.psychotherapie.nl);
- Nuffic: [www.nuffic.nl](http://www.nuffic.nl);
- Disciplinary Committee for the health care Sector: [www.tuchtcollege-gezondheidszorg.nl](http://www.tuchtcollege-gezondheidszorg.nl);
- training institutions:
  - RINO North-Holland (Amsterdam): [www.rino.nl](http://www.rino.nl);
  - RINO Group (Utrecht and Leiden/Rotterdam): [www.rinogroep.nl](http://www.rinogroep.nl);
  - SPON post-doctorate programmes (Nijmegen): [www.spon-opleidingen.nl](http://www.spon-opleidingen.nl);
  - RINO South (Eindhoven): [www.rinozuid.nl](http://www.rinozuid.nl);
  - Training institute PPO (Groningen): [www.ppo-opleidingen.nl](http://www.ppo-opleidingen.nl).

Should you have any further questions after reading the preceding chapters, please contact the FGzPt, which published this brochure.

You can contact FGzPt by:

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