

State Licensure Requirements to Become a Mental Health Counselor

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GCN 522 Foundations of Mental Health Counseling

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April 17, 2023

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Beginning my journey to become a mental health counselor, I have become aware of the stringent requirements to accomplish this goal. Admitting I was naive to the requirements, the following research has answered many questions regarding the role of a Licensed Mental Health Counselor(LMHC) or a Licensed Practicing Counselor(LPC) and the process. An LMHC or LPC is trained to help individuals with mental and emotional disorders and behavioral difficulties. In addition, they provide help and direction in areas such as relationships, education, and careers. They assess and evaluate, create treatment plans, implement the treatment plan, and document progress. Mental health counselors are dedicated to the optimal function of individuals, families, and organizations (New York Mental Health Counselor Association, n.d., para. 3).

Licensed mental health counselors are protected, licensed, and regulated under the New York State Law Education Department Office of Professions. Under Article 163 of NYS Education Law, section 8402 defines an LMHC.

Only a person licensed or exempt under Article 163 shall practice mental health counseling or use the title "mental health counselor." Only a person licensed under the Article shall use the title "licensed mental health counselor" or any other designation tending to imply that the person is licensed to practice mental health counseling (New York Mental Health Counselor Association, n.d., para. 3).

When a person is exempt, they are unlicensed. However, they may still work in practices related to psychology, social work, mental health counseling, and related fields funded or approved by the Department of mental hygiene. Section 8407 provides what New York State deems practicing outside the scope, including treatment of a serious mental illness, determining medical care, and prescribing medication.

Obtaining your licensure requires specific education and experience. A counselor's education includes a master's degree or higher in counseling that must align in accordance with the commissioner's regulation. The college or university you attend must have CACREP accreditation. Graduate coursework consists of research and evaluation, assessments, group work, and ethics but is extensive in many areas.

A person seeking licensure must complete at least three thousand hours of post-masters supervised experience, not including internship hours. This includes over two years of supervised experience in an approved New York State Education Department setting. Supervision by an LMHC, licensed psychologist, or psychiatrist is also a requirement. An additional requirement is child abuse reporting training. For the licensure application, a verification form is required from your supervisor stating you have completed the requirement.

The NCMHCE, National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination, is the examination a candidate must take and pass by New York State. The exam may be taken upon completion of your graduate program. Like most state examinations, registration is required for the dates posted yearly. Before being admitted to the examination, New York State requires the following steps to be completed. The first two are to submit an application for licensure along with the fee and verify you have completed your education requirement with your school using the Certification of Education form with your transcript. The final two steps involve receiving approval from the New York State Department of Education and registering once you are notified of your eligibility.

The format for the NCMHCE changed in 2022. The examination consists of 11 case studies, where 10 are scored. Each case study is a clinical narrative (representing commonly encountered presenting concerns) of 13 multiple-choice questions with 4 options and only 1

correct answer (3 of these 13 questions are unscored), which differs from the previous version (aatbs.com, n.d., para. 1) The diagnosis is given at the beginning of each question. The examination measures more clinical application rather than focusing on a diagnosis. Before being admitted to the examination, New York State requires the four steps to be completed mentioned previously.

Under Education Law, Title VIII- The Professions, New York State requires those in the professions to have a standing “of good moral character.” Article 163, section 8402, under the heading of character, states, “the determination of whether an applicant for authorization to practice a profession, under title VIII of the Education Law, is of good moral character shall be made in accordance with the procedures specified in this Part.” (New York State Education Department, n.d., para. f). Sub Part 28 determines what it means to be of good moral character. The committee must review whether a person has been convicted of a crime or has committed an act that questions an applicant's moral character. Moral character is how a person behaves and what they find ethical or unethical. Once the above criteria are completed, the applicant should complete the application for a permit/licensure.

Professional Organizations

Organizations such as the ACA, AMHCA, and AACC have been formed to protect the members' rights and support the philosophical beliefs of their membership. (Neukrug, 2016 p.12, para 3) The ACA is the world's largest association and currently sponsors nineteen divisions and 56 chartered branches. ACA of New York's mission echoes that of the American Counseling Association: "to enhance the quality of life in society by promoting the development of professional counselors, advancing the counseling profession, and using the profession and practice of counseling to promote respect for human dignity and diversity"(American Counseling Association, n.d., para 3). The ACA offers tools to build your career, connect with fellow professionals, and educate and provide a code of ethics to follow. Student registration costs \$105 annually, and you must be in a graduate program. Some benefits offered with registration are a discount on liability insurance, advocacy action alerts and news updates, career consultations, and access to job boards. The annual events include a convention and expo. They have network opportunities along with continuing education sessions.

One of the divisions I am interested in is The Association for Creativity in Counseling. ACC's goal is to promote greater awareness, advocacy, and understanding of diverse and creative approaches to counseling (American Counseling Association, n.d.). People have access to many tools on the internet. This has created a new way of learning, and with a new way of learning, we must create new ways to handle the problems that may arise. People learn differently. Creating new ways to help people achieve maximum mental health and healing is vital for the fast-paced world we currently are a part.

“The AMHCA was born in May 1976 when Jim Messina and Nancy Spisso, then director and co-director, respectively, of the Escambia County (Florida) Mental Health Center, were

discussing the issue of the lack of a professional organization for community counselors” (American Mental Health Counselors Association, 2010). At the time AMHCA was formed, licensure did not exist. The cost to join as a student is \$84 annually. Similar to ACA, the benefits of becoming a member are lucrative. They offer guidance, webinars, volunteer opportunities, and collaboration. They provide access to publications, consultations with the ethical committee, and professional development. The American Mental Health Counselors Association (AMHCA) promotes the expansion of medical and behavioral health services that are also included in the ten essential benefits of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). (American Mental Health Counselors Association, 2010, para.1) The AMHCA also hosts an annual conference for its members.

The American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) charges a membership fee of \$129 annually; the student fee is \$54. The membership provides access to a members-only area, different newsletters monthly and some quarterly, and a one-year referral network subscription. They have ten divisions, including a military counseling initiative, a multicultural division, and an addiction and recovery network. I would be most interested in the International Christian Coaching Association. The fee to join the association is \$69 annually and offers access to coaching resources and webinars, Christian Coaching Today Magazine, and support. Coaching has always been an interest to me. Supporting others and helping them reach their goals has always brought me joy. The events include a Mental Health Counseling Summit, Virtual EMDR Basic Training, and a world conference with learning and growth opportunities.

Each association brings a wealth of knowledge and support to the counseling field. They also provide networking, continuing education, and an abundance of information. The variety between what each offers brings a clear understanding of why a counselor should belong to a few.

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