

State Licensure Requirements and Professional Organizations

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I have discovered that getting a license to practice as a mental health counselor takes many steps. It was disappointing to learn that my psychology undergraduate studies in my home country did not satisfy the standards for working in the psychology area after I immigrated to this nation. With my previous experiences and limited English skills, looking for career chances could have been more aggravating. However, after seven years, God's guidance paved the way for my new chapter in life, which began as a bilingual clinician at an ORR shelter program. This assignment undoubtedly aided my preparation to obtain a license as a mental health counselor.

State Licensure Requirements

First, it is essential to differentiate the role of a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) and a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC). According to the American Counseling Association, "Licensed professional counselors (LPCs) are master's-degreed mental health service providers, trained to work with individuals, families, and groups in treating mental, behavioral, and emotional problems and disorders. On the other hand, LMHCs are mental health professionals who typically work in specific fields of mental health or with specific populations.

As mentioned, the main difference between an LMHC and an LPC is practice breadth and concentration. In terms of evaluating, diagnosing, treating, and preventing mental diseases, LMHCs have extensive training. Working with individuals with mental illnesses will take up a significant portion of the workday if someone pursues a career in this field. LPCs, on the other hand, may concentrate on other areas of counseling, such as marital and family concerns or professional issues, even though they have expertise in mental illness and can assist clients in dealing with its impacts. Definitely, the precise areas of specialization, criteria for education and licensing, and work environments can vary based on state and regulatory restrictions.

Second, the scope of practice of the profession of mental health counseling is defined as the evaluation, assessment, amelioration, treatment, modification, or adjustment of a disability, problem, or disorder of behavior, character, development, emotion, personality, or relationships by the use of verbal or behavioral methods with individuals, couples, families, or groups in private practice, group practice, or organized settings; and the use of assessment instruments and mental health counseling and psychotherapy to identify, evaluate, and treat dysfunctions and disorders for purposes of providing appropriate mental health counseling services. In summary, LMHCs are prepared to offer a variety of psychotherapy methods to people of all ages struggling with various mental health issues. They also create tailored treatment programs for each of their patients. In addition, LMHCs could be asked to help patients in a crisis or who have severe mental health symptoms by offering emergency mental health services.

Third, obtaining the education and experience necessary to obtain an LMHC is crucial. A professional should have graduated from a program that the department registered or judged to comply with the commissioner's standards, including programs leading to master's or higher degrees in counseling. This entails completing 60 semester hours of the required curriculum and a one-year, 600-clock-hour, supervised internship or practicum in mental health counseling. Additionally, a candidate must complete at least three thousand hours of post-master-level supervised experience associated with mental health counseling that is acceptable to the board and in compliance with the commissioner's rules.

Otherwise, determining one's moral character is another important subject. According to the steps outlined in this part, it must be determined if a candidate for authorization to practice a profession under Title VIII of the Education Law is of good moral character. In other words, any

evidence showing that a candidate has been found guilty of a crime or has engaged in behavior that creates doubt about their moral integrity.

Furthermore, all mental health counselors are required to complete a test. The National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination (NCMHCE), the licensing test for LMHC, is necessary to obtain a license as a mental health counselor in the United States. Candidates for the New York State licensing exam for mental health counselors must have finished their graduate school and acquired their graduate degree to be admitted to the exam.

In fact, there are 11 case studies in the NCMHCE test format. One of the case studies will not be scored, and 100 of the multiple-choice questions will be scored. The testing period will last the applicants 255 minutes. The case studies on the NCMHCE's new format are made to resemble the work that clinical mental health counselors do. Each case study will have a single story and between nine and fifteen multiple-choice questions. Indeed, they will comprise the first intake summary and two subsequent counseling sessions. An entry-level counselor's capacity to apply knowledge of professional practice and ethics, intake, assessment, diagnosis, treatment planning, counseling skills and interventions, and core counseling attributes in a real-world clinical mental health session is assessed through these multiple-choice questions based on the narrative.

Finally, candidates may submit an application for a limited permit along with a fee of \$70 at the same time as or later than submitting their application for licensure, a \$371 licensure fee, and certification of professional education, which serves as proof of good education. While practicing with permission is permitted, more than the experience gained with a restricted permit might be required for licensure.

Professional Organizations

Becoming a member of a counseling association can offer several benefits for individuals who work or are studying in the field of counseling. Three of the most influential organizations are ACA, AMHCA, and AACC.

First, the American Counseling Association is a non-profit, professional, and educational group devoted to developing and improving the counseling profession. The largest association globally, the ACA was established in 1952 and exclusively represents professional counselors in various practice settings. The objective of the ACA is to provide every person with access to high-quality professional therapy so they can thrive. The ACA supports counselors' professional growth, defends the field, and assures moral, inclusive standards that safeguard clients of counseling services. In addition, the ACA also includes 19 divisions. They publish journals and newsletters and offer various professional development opportunities (Neukrug, p. 12). It resembles belonging to a community, which is crucial for our development as professionals. The Association for Child and Adolescent Counseling is the division I am most interested in because it focuses on the educational requirements of counselors who work with kids and teens while offering them support on the job, whether they are school counselors, play therapists or counselor educators.

Regarding membership, the ACA offers various annual choices. The Student and New Professional price is \$105; this is for master's degree candidates or recent graduates. Regular membership costs \$189 and is open to ACA-aligned counselors who need more specific professional credentials. Counselor instructors and seasoned counselors pay a professional fee of \$189. The cost of retirement is \$105 per year. Regarding annual conferences, ACA held the

ACA Conference & Expo, which is ACA's flagship educational event focusing on the professional development of counselors in various practice settings.

Furthermore, the American Mental Health Counselors Association, or AMHCA, is another organization and the 13th section of the American Counseling Association. It was established in 1978. It is regarded as the world's most prominent counseling organization for clinical mental health counselors. It serves as a base of operations for counselors who provide services in organizations and community-based settings. Collaboration, advocacy, research, ethical practice, teaching, training, and professional growth are part of the purpose. There were none discovered. Some advantages of joining AMHCA include networking, blogging possibilities, consultation with the ethics committee, advocacy and education opportunities, and access to AMHCA publications. Indeed, no divisions were established. Seven membership tiers are available from AMHCA. The cost for Clinical and Regular is \$183. New York is not on the list; the combined membership charge is \$147 plus a State charge. New member dues are \$84 for students, \$84 for associates, \$79 for retirees, and \$79 for emerging members. A decision tree on the website helps counselors determine which AMHCA membership is best for their practice. Annual conferences are something that AMHC offers, and this year's program will be full of issues that are in dire need of attention, such as Trauma, Addictions, Diversity topics like LGBTQ+, and Social Justice.

Lastly, the American Association of Christian Counselors, or AACC, is another organization. The AACC is dedicated to assisting Christian mental health professionals, including licensed psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, psychotherapists, marriage and family therapists, addictions counselors, Christian life and mental health coaches, pastors, lay counselors, and the general public. In order to assist in counseling and ministering to persons

who need assistance in reaching mental wellness, personal wholeness, interpersonal competence, and spiritual development, it is intended to provide those in the helping profession with research-based biopsychosocial knowledge and spiritual truths. Along with advocating for spiritual practices and spirituality within mental health care, the AACC is also on a mission to assist churches worldwide in becoming more compassionate and mentally healthy. Access to electronic magazines or journals, newsletters, an online resource database, clinical insights, a membership certificate, and Christian Care Connect are just a few advantages. The AACC has ten divisions. The Society for Christian Psychology appeals to me. The Society for Christian Psychology was founded to educate individuals on the fundamental ideas of Christian psychology and give academic psychologists and working clinicians a voice in the field's growth. I have always been interested in combining psychology and biblical counseling. There are five ways to join the AACC. Premier fees are \$89 per year, while the Presidential charge is \$129. The fees for students with insurance are \$74, those without insurance are \$54, and those for retirees are also \$54. The benefits are the same, but the presidential plan includes access to a referral network, webinars, magazine quizzes, clinical insights, and counseling trends. The AACC also hosts an annual international conference in terms of yearly conferences. Know Hope World Conference 2023 AACC will present various subjects, including issues with mental health, how to apply to individual, couple, or family therapy, abuse, trauma-informed care, addictions, grieving, and suicide, among others.

Overall, counseling professionals can gain a lot from joining a counseling association. It may offer resources for advocacy and credentialing, networking opportunities, and professional development support. Early career association is crucial for students because it gives them a feeling of identity and allows them to participate in decisions that could significantly influence

their future endeavors. Joining a counseling association provides support and guidance throughout the professional path.

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