



Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Licensure

1. What is Professional Counseling?

Professional counseling is defined in the Connecticut licensing statute as:

“[T]he application, by persons trained in counseling, of established principles of psycho-social development and behavioral science to the evaluation, assessment, analysis, diagnosis and treatment of emotional, behavioral or interpersonal dysfunction or difficulties that interfere with mental health and human development. ‘Professional counseling’ includes, but is not limited to, individual, group, marriage and family counseling, functional assessments for persons adjusting to a disability, appraisal, crisis intervention and consultation with individuals and groups.”

“Professional counseling” may only be practiced by those who are validly licensed as professional counselors (LPCs) or professional counselor associates (LPCAs). The Connecticut Counseling Association (CCA) represents, advocates for and promotes the vital work of these dedicated counselors throughout the state.

2. What is the LPCA? Can you explain the recent change in the licensing law?

As of October 1, 2019, professional counselors in Connecticut will be licensed under a structure that provides for two tiers of licensure.

The two tiers are referred to in the statute as “professional counselors” and “professional counselor associates.” In this FAQ we will use the shorthand “LPC” and “LPCA.” LPCA is the new designation and is considered the “first tier” of licensure. While we will periodically refer to the LPC as “full” licensure, this is intended only as a descriptive term for the purposes of this FAQ to distinguish from “associate” licensure. Practitioners at *both* levels of licensure should be considered as state-approved licensed mental health care providers, though of course with different rights and responsibilities.

This change to two tiered licensure comes as a result of a multi-year effort by CCA to secure legislation that allows professional counselors to become licensed upon completing graduate school, rather than having to work as unlicensed practitioners while completing the 3000 hours of counseling experience needed for full licensure. This change puts professional counselors in line with their social work colleagues in Connecticut, as well as with their counseling colleagues in approximately forty other states. Along with professional counselors, our colleagues in the marital and family therapy profession achieved tiered licensure during this legislative term.

If you have received your graduate degree and are currently working as a counselor toward your LPC, apply NOW for your LPCA. See Question 6 for a discussion of this important issue.

3. Where can I find information on how to apply for the LPC or LPCA?

Counselor licensure in Connecticut is overseen by the Department of Public Health. (Unlike other states, Connecticut does not have a specific counselor licensure board or committee. Instead, the DPH's Health Care Practitioner Licensing and Investigations Section ("DPH Health Care PLIS") oversees licensure of professional counselors along with all other licensed health care providers and related fields. You can access the DPH Health Care PLIS website at:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Practitioner-Licensing--Investigations/PLIS/Practitioner-Licensing--Investigations-Section>

Once on the homepage, find the link for information relating to "Professional Counselors."

The portal for applying online for the LPCA can be accessed at:

<https://portal.ct.gov/DPH/Practitioner-Licensing--Investigations/Professional-Counselor/Professional-Counselor-Associate>

CCA will continue to provide updated information on all licensing related matters on the CCA website, but you should *always* check the official Health Care PLIS website to ensure accuracy.

4. Am I eligible to become an LPCA?

To be granted a license as an LPCA:

(i) you must demonstrate to DPH that you earned a degree in clinical mental health counseling from a CACREP accredited program OR, for those who do not have such a degree, demonstrate that you completed the curricular and fieldwork requirements that are specifically set forth in the statute. Please see the response to Question 9 for a more detailed discussion of those requirements; and

(ii) pay a fee of \$220.

The DPH Health Care PLIS website has recently been updated to include information regarding the LPCA. It lists the documentation requirements as follows:

An applicant for licensure shall arrange for the submission of the following documentation directly from the source:

An official transcript and course of study form sent directly from each educational institution attended verifying all graduate level coursework completed and degree conferred;

A completed application and fee in the amount of \$220. Applications are only accepted online.

See the link to the application portal in the response to Question 3. *Please consult the DPH website for all official information regarding the LPCA. Once you have submitted your application for the LPCA online, your portal will be updated with any change in your status. Please remember to consult the portal before trying to get in touch directly with DPH.*

5. Do I need to pass an exam to become an LPCA?

No. In order to become an *LPC*, you will need to pass an “examination prescribed by the commissioner [of DPH].” The exams that are currently prescribed are the NCE and the NCMHCE. The LPCA, however, does *not* require passage of the exam. It should be noted that, as a matter of course, many graduates of the state’s counseling programs take the exam [usually the NCE] during their final semester or shortly thereafter. So it may be the case that you will have passed the exam by the time you apply for your LPCA, but it is not necessary.

6. I am currently an LPC. Does the change in the law affect me?

No. If you are currently licensed as a professional counselor you do not need to do anything differently as a result of the new law. You may, however, want to ensure that you are up to date on the continuing education requirements, which were changed as a result of new legislation in 2017. Please see the response to Question 8 for a more detailed discussion of the continuing education requirements.

7. I am not yet licensed. Do I *need* to become an LPCA or can I just wait and apply for the LPC?

As we will explain in more detail below, you *need* to become an LPCA. If you are currently working in the field as a pre-licensed counselor, *apply as soon as possible for your LPCA.*

In order to become an *LPC*, you will have to meet certain requirements, including demonstrating to DPH that you have acquired three thousand hours of supervised postgraduate experience “in the practice of professional counseling.” Prior to the recent change in the statute, pre-licensed counselors who were working toward their three thousand hours did so under an *exemption* to the law that otherwise requires a license to practice professional counseling.

The exemption for pre-licensed counselors has now been eliminated. Additionally, the statute states that “no person may practice professional counseling unless licensed” and further states that holders of the LPCA may practice “professional counseling under professional supervision.” Thus, any counselor working toward full licensure as an *LPC* will *need to be licensed as an LPCA* to engage in the practice of professional counseling, and will need to work under supervision while licensed as an *LPCA*.

The path to “full” licensure as an *LPC* has not otherwise been changed by the new statute. Applicants for the *LPC* must demonstrate passage of the exam (see Question 5) and acquire “three thousand hours of postgraduate experience under professional supervision, including a minimum of one hundred hours of direct professional supervision, in the practice of professional counseling, performed over a period of not less than two years.” “Direct professional

supervision” is defined as requiring “face-to-face consultation between one supervisor. . . and one person receiving supervision that consists of not less than a monthly review with a written evaluation and assessment by the supervisor of such person's practice of professional counseling.”

As set forth in the new statute, “an individual licensed as a professional counselor [LPC] . . . may [engage] in the independent practice of professional counseling.”

To summarize: under the new statute, the LPCA will be required for counselors who are working toward full licensure. Even for those who graduated and began accruing hours toward full licensure before the October 1, 2019 implementation of the new law, all hours worked after October 1 will need to be as an LPCA. Thus, for example, even if you have already completed 2000 post-graduate hours of counseling experience, the remaining 1000 hours that you will need to complete your LPC will - after October 1 - need to be as an LPCA. Apply TODAY for your LPCA.

We have been assured by the DPH Health Care PLIS that they will be working as quickly as possible to issue licenses upon receipt of completed applications. In general practice, it takes about 15 business days for them to process an application. Please note that DPH recognizes the urgency that the October 1 effective date of this statute imposes upon pre-licensed counselors already in the field and they will be working diligently to issue the licenses quickly. Assist them in doing this by making sure that your application is complete and that you have paid the application fee. **APPLY TODAY.**

Please note: if you work for a clinic, agency or other employer that has questions about the effect of this statute on pre-licensed counselors, CCA’s leaders will be happy to discuss with them the roll-out of the legislation and will put them in touch with the appropriate contact at the DPH Health Care PLIS to address any specific concerns they may have. The October 1 implementation date of this statute may result in some brief periods of confusion, but we anticipate that within a short period of time the LPCA tier will be running smoothly. The best way for you to help is to get your application submitted as soon as possible.

8. Are there continuing education requirements for LPCAs?

Yes. LPCAs are subject to the same continuing education requirements as LPCs.

Current regulations require that licensees applying for license renewal shall complete a minimum of 15 hours of qualifying continuing education during the one-year period for which the license is being renewed.

Continuing education requirements include that: **(A)** at least one contact hour of training or education each registration period must be on the topic of cultural competency, **(B)** “not less than two contact hours of training or education during the first renewal period in which continuing education is required and not less than once every six years thereafter [the training or education must be] on the topic of mental health conditions common to veterans and family members of veterans, including (i) determining whether a patient is a veteran or family member of a veteran, (ii) screening for conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, risk of suicide, depression and grief, and (iii) suicide prevention training, and **(C)** not less than three contact hours of training or education each registration period be on the topic of professional ethics

Please note that regulations regarding continuing education are established by the DPH commissioner. You should always consult the Health Care PLIS website to determine the current regulations and whether you are in compliance.

9. Is the LPCA renewable? Is there a time limit on how long I can hold the LPCA license?

The LPCA may be renewed annually and there is no statutory limit on the number of times license holders can renew. (Renewals are subject to the same fee of \$195 that applies to LPCs.) Accordingly, the LPCA license has been structured in such a way that it might be held indefinitely. You should note, however, that the statute specifically prohibits LPCAs from engaging in the “independent practice of professional counseling” and specifically requires LPCAs to practice under professional supervision.

10. I heard there were recent changes to the curriculum and fieldwork requirements for licensure. What are these changes and where can I find this information?

In 2017, also as a result of CCA’s strong lobbying efforts, the counseling licensure statute was revised to greatly strengthen the educational and fieldwork requirements for licensure. The primary change to the law established two educational routes to counseling licensure depending on whether the applicant was a graduate of a CACREP accredited clinical mental health program or not.

The changes that were made in 2017 are now also part of the new legislation establishing tiered licensure. Please note that the *post-graduate* requirements for the LPCA and LPC are the same regardless of the degree earned.

The two different graduate program “paths” toward licensure are:

(i) A degree in clinical mental health counseling as part of a program of higher learning accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (“CACREP”); or

(ii) A graduate degree (and completion of at least sixty graduate semester hours) in counseling or a related mental health field (defined as “social work, marriage and family therapy or psychology”) at a regionally accredited institution of higher education. For these degree holders, the educational and fieldwork requirements have been spelled out in greater detail to ensure that all licensed counselors in Connecticut have graduate-level training comparable to that provided by CACREP-accredited programs. Accordingly, licensure applicants in this category must demonstrate completed coursework in each of the following areas: Human growth and development; social and cultural foundations; counseling theories; counseling techniques; group counseling; career counseling; appraisals or tests and measurements to individuals and groups; research and evaluation; professional orientation to mental health counseling; addiction and substance abuse counseling; trauma and crisis counseling; and diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders.

Applicants without clinical mental health counseling degrees from CACREP programs must also demonstrate completion of a one-hundred-hour practicum in counseling taught by a faculty member licensed or certified as a professional counselor or its equivalent in another state, and completion of a six-hundred-hour clinical mental health counseling internship taught by a faculty member licensed or certified as a professional counselor or its equivalent in another state.

11. What is the NCC credential? Is it the same as licensure?

The National Board for Certified Counselors provides a process by which counselors can receive board certification as National Certified Counselors (NCC). Certification as an NCC is *not* the same as holding a state-sanctioned license. The NBCC website has an excellent description of the distinction between certification and licensure under the tab “Board Certification and Licensure” at: <https://www.nbcc.org/certification>.

Information on NCC eligibility can also be found here.

12. Where can I find information on registering for the National Counselor Exam (NCE) and the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Exam (NCMHCE)?

Information about both exams can be found on the website of the National Board for Certified Counselors: <https://www.nbcc.org>

13. I did not graduate from a CACREP counseling program. Am I still eligible for licensure in CT?

Yes, if certain conditions are met. If you did not receive a degree in clinical mental health counseling from a CACREP accredited program, you may still be able to become licensed (LPCA/LPC) as a counselor in Connecticut. You will have to demonstrate to DPH that you have met certain curricular and fieldwork requirements, and your degree must be in counseling or a related mental health field (social work, marriage and family therapy, or psychology). See the response to Question 10 for a more complete description of these requirements.

14. Who can supervise LPCAs for the supervision hours needed to earn full licensure?

The Connecticut professional counselor licensing statute contains a definition of the term “Under Professional Supervision” which includes a list of those *Connecticut* licensed professionals from whom counselors may receive the supervision required to practice as an LPCA. That list includes: licensed professional counselors, physicians certified in psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, advanced practice registered nurses who are certified as a psychiatric and mental health clinical nurse specialists or nurse practitioners by the American Nurses Credentialing Center, psychologists, licensed marital and family therapists, and licensed clinical social workers.

Any questions about these materials may be directed to CCA at cca_exec_dir@msn.com