

WHO ARE LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

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Licensed professional counselors (or in some states, “licensed clinical professional counselors” or “licensed mental health counselors”) provide mental health and substance abuse care to millions of Americans.

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. LPCs make up a large percentage of the workforce employed in community mental health centers, agencies, and organizations, and are employed within and covered by managed care organizations and health plans. LPCs also work with active duty military personnel and their families, as well as veterans.

LPC QUALIFICATIONS

More than 120,000 professional counselors are licensed across the country, under licensure laws enacted in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. LPC education and training standards for licensure are on par with those of the other two master’s level mental health providers (clinical social workers and marriage and family therapists). State licensure requirements for professional counselors typically include:

- possession of a master’s or doctoral degree in counseling from a national or regionally-accredited institution of higher education, including an internship and coursework on human behavior and development, effective counseling strategies, ethical practice, and other core knowledge areas;
- completion of a minimum of 3,000 hours of post-master’s degree supervised clinical experience, performed within two years, and periodic com-

pletion of continuing education credits/hours after obtaining licensure;

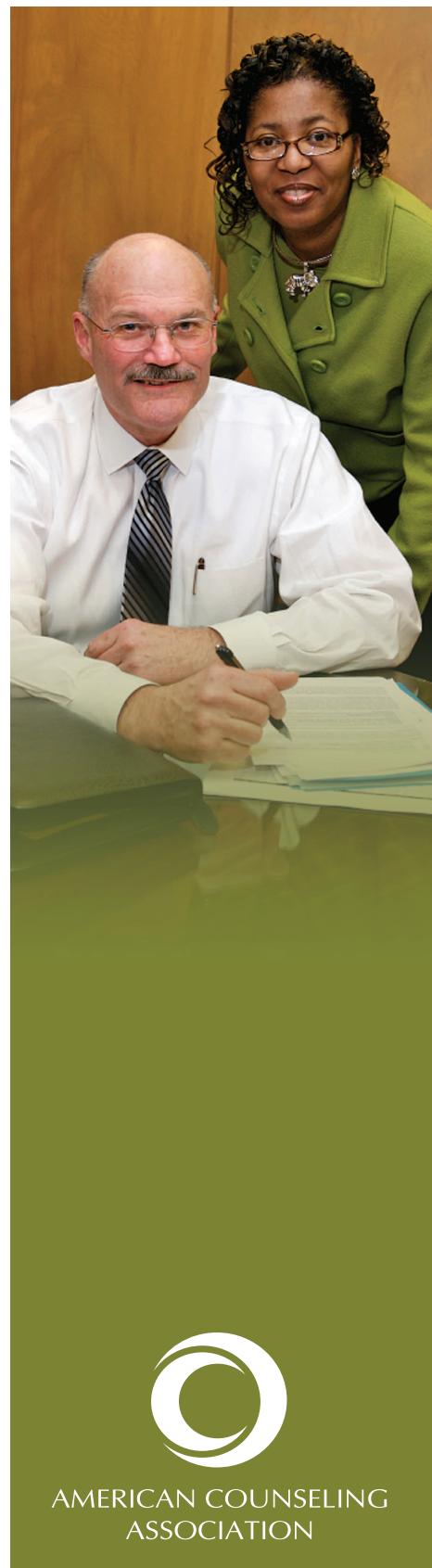
- passage of the National Counselor Examination (NCE) or a similar state-recognized exam; and
- adherence to a strict Code of Ethics and recognized standards of practice, as regulated by the state’s counselor licensure board.

WHAT DO LPCS DO?

The practice of professional counseling includes, but is not limited to, the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders, including addictive disorders; psychoeducational techniques aimed at the prevention of such disorders; consultation to individuals, couples, families, groups, and organizations; and research into more effective therapeutic treatment modalities.

Counselors’ training in the provision of counseling and therapy includes the etiology of mental illness and substance abuse disorders, and the provision of the well-established treatments of cognitive-behavioral, interpersonal, and psychodynamic therapy. Counselors’ education and training is oriented toward the adoption of a truly client-centered, and not primarily illness-centered, approach to therapy.

Licensed professional counselors and members of the other non-physician mental health professions of psychology, clinical social work, marriage and family therapy, and psychiatric nursing provide the large majority of mental health services in the U.S. Roughly one in four Americans suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year, and about one in five Americans experience a mood disorder such as depression at some point in the course of their life.



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HOW TO FIND A LICENSED COUNSELOR

To search for a licensed counselor online, visit The Therapy Directory on the *Psychology Today* website at <http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/>. You can search by zip code, area of specialty, and/or other criteria. Two other common ways to find a licensed counselor are by word-of-mouth and by looking in the yellow pages (typically under “counseling” or “counselors”; “marriage and family counseling”; or “mental health services”). Look for individuals who identify themselves as a “Licensed Professional Counselor” or “LPC.” While some states have a variation of this title, the key words to look for are “licensed” and “counselor.” Your state’s counselor board website can let you know the specific designation in your state. Go to <http://www.counseling.org/Counselors/LicensureAndCert.aspx> to find a directory of state counselor licensure boards, including their phone number and internet address. Many state board web sites include search functions which let you verify the licensure of individual practitioners.

NEED FOR SERVICES

- 45.1 million adults (19.9%) in the United States had mental illness in the past year. Of those, nearly 8.9 million (20%) also had a substance use disorder.
- 11 million adults (4.8%) had serious mental illness (SMI)—a diagnosable mental disorder that substantially interfered with or limited one or more major life activities—in the past year.
- Less than 4 in 10 adults with mental illness in the past year received mental health services.
- In 2009, 14.8 million people (6.5% of adults aged 18 or older) had at least one major depressive episode during the past year.
- In 2009, 2 million youths (8.1% of the population aged 12 to 17) had at least one major depressive episode during the past year.

- In 2009, an estimated 8.4 million adults (3.7%) age 18 or older had serious thoughts of suicide in the past year. 2.2 million adults made suicide plans in the past year and approximately 1 million adults attempted suicide in the past year.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2010). *Results from the 2009 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Mental Health Findings* (Office of Applied Studies, NSDUH Series H-39, HHS Publication No. SMA 10-4609). Rockville, MD.



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