BOARD OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions for Out-of-State and Out-of-Country Applicants

Answers to Common Questions and Helpful Resources for LCSW, LMFT, LPCC Applicants

BBS
Board of Behavioral Sciences

WELCOME!

We're here to help you navigate the licensing process in California. In this guide, you'll find answers to common questions, along with helpful links and guidance.

Please note:

LCSW stands for Licensed Clinical Social Worker.

LMFT stands for Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist.

LPCC stands for Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor.

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A. PROVIDING SERVICES TO CLIENTS

1. Can an applicant provide services to clients located in California while going through the licensure process?

You must hold a California license or registration to see clients physically located in California. If you do not yet meet the requirements for licensure, you may apply for an associate registration (see section C). Once your registration is issued, you may practice under a qualified supervisor in California while you are completing the licensure requirements.

2. What is required to provide telehealth services to a client located in California?

You must have a current, active California license or registration to provide marriage and family therapy, educational psychology, clinical social work, or professional clinical counseling services to clients in California, whether in-person or via telehealth. For additional requirements, see the Board's publication Are You Going to Provide Telehealth Services in California? (PDF), located on the Board website under Updates/FAQs. Also see question #4 below.

3. I am licensed in another state or country, but do not hold a license in California. What are the laws about providing services to clients located in other jurisdictions while I am in California?

Please see the Board's publication Are You Going to Provide Telehealth Services in California? (PDF), located on the Board's website under Updates/FAQs. Also see question #4 below.

B. RECIPROCITY

4. Does the Board offer reciprocity of licensure for mental health professionals licensed in another state or country?

California does not offer license reciprocity. This means you cannot transfer an out-of-state license directly into California. However, California does offer a streamlined pathway to licensure for practitioners who hold a license in another U.S. state or territory, and who meet certain requirements and apply under Path A.

California also offers a one-time per calendar year, 30-day temporary practice allowance (see the Board's publication, Temporary Practice Allowance for Out-of-State Licensees (PDF), located on the Board's website under Licensees). This allows qualifying marriage and family therapists, professional clinical counselors, and clinical social workers who are licensed in another U.S. state or territory to provide therapy services to an existing client while the client is travelling in California.

The streamlined pathway and temporary practice allowance are not available to individuals who hold a license in another country. However, these individuals are welcome to apply for a registration and/or a license under Path B.

C. APPLYING FOR ASSOCIATE REGISTRATION IN CALIFORNIA

5. Am I required to apply for an associate registration prior to applying for licensure?

No, an associate registration is not required unless you need to obtain additional supervised experience prior to applying for licensure under Path B. You may also want to obtain an associate registration if you wish to work in California while you are working toward meeting Path B requirements.

6. Does an applicant need to be a California resident to apply for a registration in California?

No, California residency is not required.

7. How long does it take to obtain a registration?

Processing times vary, but typically it takes 30 to 60 days from the date your application is received. For updates on processing times, follow us on Facebook, Instagram, or X.



8. What are the requirements to apply for an associate registration in California?

You must meet all legal requirements described in the associate application instructions. There are two separate associate applications:

- The in-state application is for individuals with a degree from a school located in California, or from an online program designed to meet California's requirements.
- The out-of-state/out-of-country application is for individuals with a degree from a school located outside of California, or from an online program not designed to meet California's requirements (Note: "out-of-country" means an applicant with a degree from a school located outside of the United States or its territories). If you have questions about the application, email the evaluators at:
  - » Associate Clinical Social Worker (ASW) Registration: **BBS.ASW@dca.ca.gov**
  - » Associate Marriage and Family Therapist (AMFT) Registration: **BBS.AMFT@dca.ca.gov**
  - » Associate Professional Clinical Counselor (APPC) Registration: **BBS.APCC@dca.ca.gov**

Associate applications can be found on the Board's website under Applicant.

9. Do applicants need to submit the Verification of License or Registration in Another State or Country form?

If the jurisdiction in which you are registered or licensed has a public online license lookup that contains information on disciplinary actions, official verification using the form is not required.

10. Does my degree qualify for a registration?

ASW registration:

California law requires a master's degree in social work from a school accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).

If your degree was earned outside of the United States or its territories, you must obtain a comprehensive evaluation of your degree to determine equivalency to a master's degree in social work from a program accredited by the CSWE. See the Board publication, **Application for Associate Clinical Social Worker Registration for Out-of-State and Out-of-Country Applicants (PDF)**, for additional requirements. The Board cannot pre-evaluate or review your education without submission of an application.

AMFT or APCC registration:

The Board cannot pre-evaluate or review your education without submission of an application. However, the Board publishes a "Guide to Educational Requirements for Out-of-State and Country Applicants" for each license type. These publications are designed to help you determine if your degree may qualify, and to provide information on coursework that you may need to take. Both the **AMFT (PDF)** guide and the **APCC (PDF)** guide are available on the Board website. The Board cannot pre-evaluate or review your education without submission of an application.

D. APPLYING FOR LICENSURE IN CALIFORNIA AND CHOOSING YOUR LICENSING PATH

11. Do I need to be a California resident to apply for licensure in California?

No, California residency is not required.

12. I have a license in another country. Can I apply/qualify for licensure in California?

Yes, you are welcome to apply in California. Before you move forward with your application, we encourage you to take some time to thoroughly review California's requirements. There are a few important considerations to keep in mind:

- California does not offer license reciprocity, because California law does not recognize licenses issued by another country. This means you cannot transfer a license from another country to California.
- **You may only apply for licensure under Path B**, because the qualifications for Path A require a license issued by another U.S. state, territory or district.
- Before applying under Path B, you will need to have your degree evaluated by a foreign credential evaluation service to determine equivalency with California's degree requirements for the license type you wish to obtain. The evaluation service must be a member of the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services.
- **Note for LMFT and LPCC Applicants**: Before paying for a degree evaluation, the Board recommends reviewing the Out-of-Country Degree Worksheet contained in the Path B licensure application for your license type to determine whether it is possible for your degree to qualify. Unfortunately, in some cases an applicant's degree will not qualify at all, and a new degree would be required.
- You must submit your degree evaluation with your application, and you will also be required to submit an official transcript. In some cases, course syllabi translated into English will be required.
- If you completed supervised experience in another country, see question 33 for more information.

13. Do I need to submit the Verification of License or Registration in Another State or Country form?

If the jurisdiction in which you are licensed or registered has a public online license lookup that contains information on disciplinary actions, official verification using the form is not required.

14. Which application should I submit and what is the process for out-of-state and out-of-country applicants?

The Board provides a summary overview of the licensure process for out-of-state and out-of-country applicants for each license type:

- LCSW Summary and Overview (PDF)
- LMFT Summary and Overview (PDF)
- LPCC Summary and Overview (PDF)

15. What are the paths to licensure that California offers?

California law provides two paths to licensure:

Path A is called "Licensure by Credential." It is a streamlined path for applicants who meet ALL FOUR of these qualifications:

1. You have held a LMFT license, a LCSW license, or a LPCC license in another U.S. jurisdiction for at least two years (time as an associate or intern does not count toward this requirement).
2. Your license is at the highest level for independent clinical practice in that jurisdiction.
3. The license you hold as an LMFT, LCSW or LPCC is current, and has been active and unrestricted for at least two years immediately before the date the Board receives your application.
4. The degree that qualified you for your LMFT, LCSW or LPCC license is obtained from a school holding a regional or national institutional accreditation recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE), or a school approved by the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education (BPPE).

Path B is called "Licensure via Education and Experience." It is for applicants who do NOT meet ALL FOUR of the requirements of Path A. The requirements under Path B are extensive and may take some time to complete. Some applicants choose to wait until they can meet the requirements of Path A instead of applying under Path B. Applicants who pursue Path B may apply for a registration as an associate, which allows you to work under supervision while you complete Path B requirements.

16. Does time as an intern or associate count toward the two-year licensure requirement for Path A?

No, only time spent holding the **highest-level LMFT, LCSW or LPCC license for independent clinical practice** counts toward the Path A requirement.

17. Which path should I apply under?

This is a personal decision based on a variety of factors, and the Board is unable to provide recommendations on which path you should apply. However, the Board publishes guides to licensure requirements for out-of-state and country applicants, all designed to help you make this determination. These publications differs based on the license type you are pursuing:

- LCSW guide (PDF)
- LMFT guide (PDF)
- LPCC guide (PDF)

E. EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS: DEGREE AND ADDITIONAL COURSEWORK

18. If my education was completed in California but I'm licensed out of state, which application do I submit?

If you are using your out-of-state license to meet any of the required qualifications under Path A or Path B, submit the out-of-state application.

19. Does my degree qualify for licensure?

If applying for an LCSW license under either Path A or Path B:

California law requires a master's degree in social work from a school accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE).



If your degree was earned outside of the United States or its territories and is **not** CSWE accredited, you must obtain a comprehensive evaluation of your degree to determine equivalency to a master's degree in social work from a program accredited by the CSWE. See the for Guide to LCSW Out-of-State Applicant Requirements for more information. The Board cannot pre-evaluate or review your education without submission of an application.

If applying for an LMFT or LPCC license under PATH A:

The degree that qualified you for your LMFT or LPCC license must be a master's or doctorate degree obtained from a school holding a regional or national institutional accreditation recognized by USDE, or a school approved by BPPE.

If applying for an LMFT or LPCC license under PATH B:

Your degree must meet all legal requirements to qualify for Path B, including the number of units and content required. Course descriptions or syllabi will be required if the course content is not easily identifiable by the course title. The law allows for some types of coursework to be remediated and allows a limited number of units to be remediated. However, in some cases an applicant's degree will not qualify, and a new degree is required.

The Board's guides to licensure requirements for out-of-state and country applicants are designed to help you determine whether your degree may qualify. See the LMFT guide and the LPCC guide for details. The Board cannot pre-evaluate or review your education without submission of an application.

20. Are there any additional coursework requirements in addition to my degree?

Yes, all out-of-state applicants, whether applying under Path A or Path B, will need to complete additional coursework. See the Board's guides to licensure requirements for out-of-state and country applicants for more information:

- LCSW guide (PDF)
- LMFT guide (PDF)
- LPCC guide (PDF)

21. Do I need all coursework completed before applying for Path A or B?

Yes, all required coursework must be completed before applying for licensure. If, after submitting your application, the Board finds any missing coursework or incomplete documentation (such as missing certificates of completion or the need for course descriptions), you will receive notification.

Your application will remain open for one year from the date you receive the notification. You won't need to reapply if you complete the courses and/or submit adequate proof of completion within that one-year period. If proof of completion or other required documentation is not submitted within that one-year period, the application will be closed, and a new application for licensure and the application fee is required.

22. Where can I obtain the required additional coursework?

Courses must be taken from a school that holds a regional or national institutional accreditation recognized by the USDE, a school approved by the BPPE, or a Board-accepted continuing education (CE) provider. Applicants are responsible for finding and verifying that a CE provider is accepted by the BBS. Please visit the Board's website for information on where to find CE courses, located under Licensees.

23. Does the Board accept undergraduate coursework?

Undergraduate coursework cannot be accepted. If planning to take a CE course, be sure to ask the provider if the course is at the graduate level.

24. What if my qualifying degree program covered the additional coursework?

If the coursework was part of the graduate degree program that qualified you for licensure, you may obtain a written certification from the school registrar or program training director stating that the coursework was a required part of the curriculum completed for your degree. You may also submit a course description or syllabus for review by the Board.

25. Do I need to take the 12-hour California Law and Ethics course even if I pass the California Law and Ethics exam?

Yes, applicants must take the California Law and Ethics course AND pass the California Law and Ethics exam. Each are separate licensing requirements, intended to ensure adequate understanding of California's unique legal requirements and ethical considerations.

F. INFORMATION ABOUT APPLYING/THE APPLICATION PROCESS

26. How long does it take to become licensed once I submit my application?

The time it takes for the Board to process an application may vary, but it typically takes 60 to 90 days from the date the application is received. For processing time updates, follow us on Facebook, Instagram, or X. If the Board finds the application is missing any coursework or other requirements, that will delay approval of the application until the documentation is received and reviewed.

The licensing process itself takes additional time after your application is approved. The timeline depends on factors such as passing the required exam(s) and submitting your Application for Initial License Issuance and fee, and may take up to 30 working days to process.

27. How do I check on my application status?

Due to high volume, we cannot provide individual status checks. Applications are processed in the order received. For updates on processing times, follow us on social media.

28. What happens to documents that I submit separately from my application?

The Board encourages applicants to submit all documents together as one package. However, if documentation is submitted separately from your application, make sure your identifying information is clear and easily accessible and specify the type of application you submitted along with the date submitted. This will assist the Board in matching the documents to the application.

29. Can I send transcripts before submitting my application?

If applicants are submitting transcripts electronically, they may be submitted before applying. If you have requested physical transcripts, mail them with your application in an envelope that has been sealed by your school.

30. Can I complete my fingerprints before submitting my application?

If obtaining your fingerprints via Live Scan from a California operator, do not complete them more than 60 days prior to submitting your application. Fingerprint results without an application on file will be held for only six months. If completing your fingerprints via hard card, submit the completed fingerprint cards to the Board with your application.

31. Can I complete a Live Scan out of state?

No, the hard card fingerprint method must be used unless it is a California Live Scan operator. To request fingerprint hard cards, send an email to BBS.Fingerprint@dca.ca.gov with "Fingerprint Hard Cards" in the subject line, and we will mail them to you.

G. EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS FOR PATH B

32. Can I transfer hours gained out of state? What do I need to submit?

Yes, but only if the experience is substantially equivalent to California's requirements, and if your supervisor meets certain qualifications. See the Board's guides to licensure requirements for out-of-state and country applicants:

- LCSW guide (PDF)
- LMFT guide (PDF)
- LPCC guide (PDF)

When ready to apply, submit an Out-of-State Experience Verification form signed by your supervisor. We will also need to verify your supervisor's license. If the jurisdiction in which your supervisor is licensed has a public online license lookup that contains information on disciplinary actions, official verification using the Verification of License or Registration in Another State or Country form is not required.

Your supervisor does **not** need to complete California's Supervision Agreement nor the Weekly Log of Experience Hours, and you do **not** need to provide W-2 forms nor verification that you were a volunteer. These documents are only required for experience gained in California.

33. Can I transfer hours gained in another country? What do I need to submit?

Yes, if your supervised experience is determined by the Board to be substantially equivalent to California's requirements, and if your supervisor meets certain qualifications. See the Board's guides to licensure requirements for out-of-state and country applicants:

- LCSW guide (PDF)
- LMFT guide (PDF)
- LPCC guide (PDF)

Note for LMFT and LPCC applicants: *The Board is not aware at this time of any countries that meet California's license equivalency requirements. As a result, we may not be able to accept supervision gained under an individual licensed in another country.*

If you believe that your supervisor does meet California's requirements, you will need to provide proof that your supervisor's license is equivalent with your application for licensure. See the Board's guides to licensure requirements for out-of-state and country applicants:

- LCSW guide (PDF)
- LMFT guide (PDF)
- LPCC guide (PDF)

Your supervisor does **not** need to complete California's Supervision Agreement nor the Weekly Log of Experience Hours, and you do **not** need to provide W-2 forms nor verification that you were a volunteer. These documents are only required for experience gained in California.

You will also need to provide verification that you held a registration while gaining those hours if your state, province or country requires unlicensed mental health professionals to be registered.

If your experience does **not** qualify, you will need to register as an associate in California and gain 3,000 hours of supervised experience, earned over a period of not less than 104 weeks (two years) to qualify for licensure. If you are interested in applying for an associate registration, please contact the Board's registration unit at the applicable email address below:

- ASW registration: BBS.ASW@dca.ca.gov
- AMFT registration: BBS.AMFT@dca.ca.gov
- APCC registration: BBS.APCC@dca.ca.gov

34. Can time licensed count toward supervised experience requirements?

You may be able to count time licensed toward the experience requirements. See the Board's guides to licensure requirements for out-of-state and country applicants:

- LCSW guide (PDF)
- LMFT guide (PDF)
- LPCC guide (PDF)

H. EXAMS AND INITIAL LICENSE ISSUANCE

35. Is the 12-hour California Law and Ethics course the same as the Law and Ethics exam?

No, these are separate requirements. All applicants must complete both the course and the exam. Together, these requirements are intended to ensure adequate understanding of California's unique legal requirements and ethical considerations.

36. What's next after passing the required exam(s)? When can I begin advertising in California or provide services to California clients?

After you have met all requirements for licensure, submit a Request for Initial License Issuance form, located on the Board website under Applicant, along with the required license issuance fee. Do not submit the form or additional fee until you have passed the required exam(s) or it will be rejected.

Your initial license must be issued before you may advertise services in California and begin seeing California clients as a licensee.



If you have further questions or need support, please don't hesitate to reach out. We're here to help you succeed!

For questions about educational requirements or associate registration:

ASW: BBS.ASW@dca.ca.gov

AMFT: BBS.AMFT@dca.ca.gov

APCC: BBS.APCC@dca.ca.gov

For questions about experience requirements or applying for licensure:

LCSW: BBS.LCSW@dca.ca.gov

LMFT: BBS.LMFT@dca.ca.gov

LPCC: BBS.LPCC@dca.ca.gov





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