

## **Handbook for Future Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCCs)**

### **Board of Behavioral Sciences**

We congratulate you on your decision to become a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor! The path to licensure as a mental health professional will require your attention to many details. This handbook from the Board of Behavioral Sciences provides a summary of requirements for licensure as well as tips that will help guide you through the process.

All licensure-related requirements that you must meet during this journey are set in law. The laws that govern the licensure process are within the California Business and Professions Code, and Title 16 of the California Code of Regulations. These codes are available in the Statutes and Regulations document on the Board's website: Visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on "Statutes & Regulations" on the left side of the blue bar at the bottom of the page.

### **About The Board Of Behavioral Sciences**

The Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS) is the state entity that regulates Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCCs) in California, as well as individuals gaining hours of supervised experience toward LPCC licensure. BBS also regulates Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs), Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs), and Licensed Educational Psychologists (LEPs). The Board also regulates certain aspects of degree programs that are designed to lead to licensure.

The Board's mission is to protect and serve Californians by setting, communicating, and enforcing standards for safe and competent mental health practice. The Board's vision is to ensure that Californians are able to access the highest-quality mental health services. To this end, the Board develops and administers licensure examinations, investigates consumer complaints and criminal convictions, responds to emerging changes and trends in the mental health profession legislatively or through regulations, and creates informative publications for consumers, applicants, and licensees.

In addition to establishing the requirements to obtain a license or registration, the Board's statutes and regulations provide the Board the authority to discipline licensees and registrants.

### **The Importance Of Being Connected With BBS**

Throughout your path to licensure, it is critical that you remain up to date on various requirements, as law and process changes do occur from time to time. The best way to remain informed is to sign up on our email subscriber list (search "BBS email alerts" at [www.dca.ca.gov](http://www.dca.ca.gov)), follow us on social media (Facebook or Twitter), and periodically check our website for updates at [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov).

### **Overview Of The Path To Licensure**

Below is an overview of the steps to LPCC licensure. The remainder of this handbook will go into more detail about each of these steps.

#### **As A Student**

You will not register with the Board as a student. However, California law sets forth the requirements for licensure related to your degree and practicum, so it's important that you pay

careful attention to meeting those requirements while in school. For more information, see Part 1.

### **Upon Graduation**

You will need to submit an application for registration as an Associate Professional Clinical Counselor (APCC), along with a fee and supporting documents upon graduation. This registration is necessary in order to earn the 3,000 hours of supervised work experience required for licensure. For more information, see Part 2.

### **Gaining Experience Hours Toward Licensure**

To gain experience hours that will count toward licensure, you must register as an APCC, be supervised by a qualified supervisor, receive weekly supervision, and meet other legal requirements. For more information, see Parts 2 and 3.

### **Special Rule On Gaining Post-Degree Hours Prior To Issuance Of Your APCC Number**

To begin gaining hours after you graduate, you need to be registered as an APCC. However, there is a special rule that may allow you to gain experience hours during the period between graduation and the issue date of your APCC registration number. To gain hours during that period, you must submit an APCC application and fee within 90 days of graduation, and you must have been fingerprinted by the agency where you are gaining hours. For more information, see Part 2.

### **California Law And Ethics Exam And APCC Renewal**

Once you are issued an APCC number, it will be valid for six years, though you must renew your number each year. In order to renew, you must pay a renewal fee and take a Law and Ethics Exam. For more information, see Part 2.

### **Applying For Licensure And The Clinical Exam**

Once you have gained all of your supervised work experience and passed the Law and Ethics Exam, your next step is to submit an Application for Licensure, along with a fee and supporting documents. Once BBS approves your Application for Licensure, you may apply to take the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Exam (NCMHCE). Once you pass this exam, you may apply for your initial LPCC license to be issued. For more information, see Part 4.

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## **Part 1: Educational Requirements**

### **Qualifying Degree**

Your first step toward becoming an LPCC in California is earning a qualifying master's or doctoral degree from one of the following types of schools:

- An educational institution accredited by a regional or national institutional accrediting agency that is recognized by the United States Department of Education.
- An educational institution approved by the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education.

Your degree program must meet the qualifications specified in law in order to qualify for licensure. Each educational institution preparing applicants to qualify for registration or licensure must notify each of its students by means of its public documents or otherwise in writing that its degree program is designed to meet the requirements of section 4999.40 of the California Business and Professions Code (BPC).

The requirements set forth in the BPC include specific content that must be covered, the number of units, and practicum requirements. The basic requirements are:

- The degree must contain an overall 60 semester units or 72 quarter units.
- The degree must contain the course content specified in BPC section 4999.33.
- The degree must meet certain practicum requirements.

### **Practicum Or Field Study**

Qualifying degree programs must include a minimum of six semester or nine quarter units of supervised practicum or field study experience that involves direct client contact in a clinical setting that provides a range of professional clinical counseling experience. Your practicum must include a minimum of 280 hours of face-to-face experience counseling individuals, families, or groups.

### **Professional Clinical Counselor Trainees**

A Professional Clinical Counselor Trainee is an individual who is enrolled in a degree program that is designed to qualify the person for LPCC licensure, and has completed no less than 12 semester units or 18 quarter units of coursework in that degree program. All counseling services provided by you as a Trainee must constitute part of your supervised course of study. No hours earned as a Trainee may count toward the 3,000 hours of experience required for licensure.

### **Responsibilities Of Your School And Work Site**

All practicum and field study hours shall be coordinated between your school and the site where your hours are being accrued. The school must approve each site and must have a written agreement with each site that details each party's responsibilities, including the methods by which supervision shall be provided. The agreement must provide for regular progress reports and evaluations of the Trainee's performance at the site.

### **Assessment And Treatment Of Couples Or Families**

To be permitted to assess and treat couples or families once licensed, you must meet certain requirements. One of those requirements can be met while you are in school. To qualify to apply for permission to treat couples and families after licensure, you must have either of the following:

- Six semester units or nine quarter units of coursework specifically focused on the theory and application of marriage and family therapy (not required to be taken within your degree program).
- A named specialization or emphasis area on the qualifying degree in marriage and family therapy; marital and family therapy; marriage, family, and child counseling; or couple and family therapy.

For more information on this requirement, see the LPCC Couples and Families Requirements FAQ: Visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on the “LPCC” button in the middle of the homepage; click “Get a License” in the dropdown menu, click “Forms/Pubs,” choose “Forms,” then scroll to the document under “Assessment and Treatment of Couples and Families.”

### **Suicide Risk Assessment And Intervention Training**

Before you can be approved to take the clinical licensure exam, you must complete six hours of coursework or gain six hours of applied experience in suicide risk assessment and intervention. You won't need to submit proof of completion until you submit an Application for Licensure.

If six hours of suicide risk assessment and intervention training was included within your qualifying degree program, you will need to obtain a written certification from the registrar or training director of your school or program. The certification must state that this coursework was included within the curriculum required for graduation, or within the coursework that was completed by you.

If the six hours is obtained as part of your applied experience, it can be met during practicum or while registered as an APCC. To satisfy this requirement, you must obtain a written certification from the director of training for the program or your primary supervisor where the qualifying experience occurred stating that the training was included within your applied experience.

If you need to take a course, it must be from one of the following providers:

- An educational institution accredited by a regional or national institutional accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education.
- An educational institution approved by the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education.
- A continuing education provider accepted by the Board.

### **Part 2: Associate**

#### **Professional Clinical Counselor Registration And The California Law And Ethics Exam**

#### **Registering As An APCC And The 90-Day Rule**

Upon graduation, you may apply to become an APCC. You won't be able to begin accruing hours toward licensure until your APCC number has been issued unless you are able to meet the terms of the 90-Day Rule.

The 90-Day Rule allows an applicant to count experience from the date of graduation if all of the following requirements are met:

- You must apply for your APCC registration within 90 days of graduation.
- You must have been fingerprinted by the agency where you would be gaining hours.
- That agency may not be a private practice.
- You must retain a copy of your Live Scan fingerprint form completed for that agency and submit it when you apply for licensure.

For full details, see the 90-Day Rule FAQ on the Board's website: Visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on "Applicant" on the top bar, then click "LPCC," then "Register as an APCC" and scroll down to "90-Day Rule/Fingerprinting."

Once issued, your APCC number will be posted to the BreZE system online at [www.breeze.ca.gov](http://www.breeze.ca.gov). Soon after, you will receive your APCC registration certificate in the mail.

Tip: Before you graduate, take a look at the Application for APCC Registration available on the Board's website so you will have an idea of what you will need to submit to the Board upon graduation.

### **Working As An APCC**

APCCs must comply with all of the following:

- Work under a qualified supervisor.
- Work as a W-2 employee or as a volunteer.
- Not practice independently.
- Not work in a private practice setting until an APCC registration number has been issued by the Board.

Other requirements pertaining to working as an APCC can be found in Part 5 of this handbook, in the FAQs for APCCs (visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on "Applicant" on the top bar, then click "LPCC," then "Forms/Pubs," choose "Publications," then click on the document under "Supervision."), and in the Board's Statutes and Regulations (visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on "Statutes & Regulations" on the left side of the blue bar at the bottom of the page).

### **Maintaining Your APCC Registration And The Law And Ethics Exam**

APCC registrations expire annually and have a total six-year time limit. Your registration's expiration date will be printed on your registration certificate. The Board will mail you a courtesy renewal notice 90 days prior to your expiration date, but it is your responsibility to renew regardless of whether the notice is received, just like a driver's license.

To renew each year, you must pay a renewal fee and meet the California Law and Ethics

Exam requirement. To meet the exam requirement, you must take the exam prior to your registration's expiration date. The Board recommends that you apply to take the exam as soon as your APCC registration has been issued and take the exam well in advance of your expiration date to ensure your ability to renew on time.

If you wait until the last minute to take the exam, you risk delaying your ability to renew. Your employer is unlikely to allow you to work with an expired registration, and you won't be able to count any experience hours toward licensure during the time your registration lapsed.

**Tip: Take the Law and Ethics Exam well in advance of your APCC registration's expiration date to ensure your ability to renew on time.**

If you don't pass the exam during your first renewal period (you may take it once every 90 days), you will need to take it again during the next renewal period before you renew again. At minimum, you must take the Law and Ethics Exam once per year until you have passed it.

See the "Exams" tab of the Board's website for more information about the Law and Ethics Exam, including a link to the Law and Ethics Exam Candidate Handbook, which contains the exam's content outline.

Once your registration's six-year time limit runs out, you may apply for a subsequent APCC registration number, but you will no longer be permitted to work in a private practice setting. In order to qualify for a subsequent APCC number, you must have passed the Law and Ethics Exam.

### **Part 3: Supervised Work Experience Requirements**

You will need 104 weeks of supervision and 3,000 hours of supervised work experience that meet all requirements as specified in law before applying for licensure. Below are some important tips to help ensure the hours you gain will count toward licensure.

- Always renew your APCC registration on time.

Take your Law and Ethics Exam early and submit your renewal fee on time to ensure your registration does not expire. Hours earned under an expired APCC registration will not count and your employer may not allow you to work.

- Keep track of important documents.

This includes supervision-related forms such as Experience Verification forms, which you will need to submit with original signatures when you apply for licensure, or your hours will not count. If you are claiming post-degree hours under the 90-Day Rule, you must retain a copy of your agency's Live Scan fingerprint form. You should also retain your signed Weekly Logs, but they are not submitted to the Board except upon request.

- Gain a thorough understanding of supervision-related requirements.

It's critical that you gain a thorough understanding of all requirements pertaining to supervision. Your supervisor must meet certain requirements and your supervised

experience must meet certain requirements for your hours to count toward licensure. There are many details to these requirements, all of which are set in law and cannot be waived. The resources at the end of this handbook will help you in this endeavor.

- Meet with your supervisor every week.

You must have a minimum of one hour of individual or triadic supervision, or two hours of group supervision in order to count work experience during that week. If you provide more than 10 hours of direct clinical counseling in a week, you are required to obtain additional supervision.

- Understand the categories of acceptable experience.

Review the LPCC Breakdown of Required Experience on the next page, including the different category minimums and maximums. For example, you will need to obtain a minimum of 150 hours of clinical experience in a hospital or community mental health setting.

- Understand pertinent employment laws.

For example, make sure that you are working as a W-2 employee or volunteer and not as an independent contractor; if your supervisor is not employed by your employer, a written oversight agreement must be in place.

- Understand the Six-Year Rule.

All work experience must be accrued no more than six years before the date BBS receives your Application for Licensure. For example, if your application was received on April 3, 2022, only the experience gained between April 3, 2016, and April 3, 2022, would count.

These are just some of the rules that pertain to supervised experience. It's important that you gain a full understanding of all requirements to ensure a smooth path to licensure. The resources in Part 6 of this handbook will assist you in doing so.

### **Supervisor Qualifications**

Only licensed mental health professionals who meet certain requirements can supervise experience that will count toward licensure. Licensed mental health professionals include any of the following:

- Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCCs)
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs)
- Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs)
- Licensed Clinical Psychologists
- Licensed Educational Psychologists (LEP) (Note: LEPs may only supervise up to 1,200 hours, which must consist of educationally related mental health services that are consistent with the LEP scope of practice described in BPC section 4989.14)
- Licensed Physicians Certified in Psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.

Your supervisor must be licensed and practicing for at least two of the past five years, must complete supervision training, maintain a current and active California license that is not under suspension or probation, and meet additional requirements.

You can check your supervisor’s license status any time at <https://search.dca.ca.gov>.

**Assessment And Treatment Of Couples Or Families: Supervised Experience Requirement**

As mentioned in Part 1, if you wish to be permitted to assess and treat couples or families once licensed, you must meet certain requirements. One of those requirements is 500 hours of supervised experience with couples, families or children. These hours must be supervised by one of the above-mentioned types of supervisors. However, if the supervisor is an LPCC, they must possess a letter from the Board that authorizes them to treat couples and families (you do not need a letter while you are an Associate). For more information, see the LPCC Couples and Families Requirements FAQ: Visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on the “LPCC” button in the middle of the homepage; click “Get a License” in the dropdown menu, click “Forms/Pubs,” choose “Forms,” then scroll to the document under “Assessment and Treatment of Couples and Families.”

**More Information On Supervised Experience Requirements**

All of the requirements in this section are explained in greater detail within the FAQs for APCCs (visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on “Applicant” on the top bar, then click “LPCC,” then “Forms/Pubs,” choose “Publications,” then click on the document under “Supervision.”) and in the Board’s Statutes and Regulations (visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on “Statutes & Regulations” on the left side of the blue bar at the bottom of the page).

**Breakdown Of Required Experience For Licensure**

Experience Type	Minimum	Maximum	Notes
Direct Clinical Counseling Experience •Individuals •Groups •Couples •Families	1,750 hours A minimum of 150 of those hours must be gained in a hospital or community mental health setting	None	A minimum of 500 hours with couples, families, or children is required to be permitted to assess and treat couples and families as an LPCC
Nonclinical Practice •Direct supervisor contact •Administering and evaluating psychological tests •Writing clinical reports, progress notes, or process notes •Client-centered advocacy	None	1,250 hours	

•Workshops, seminars, training sessions or conferences			
Supervision, Individual and/or Triadic	52 weeks that contain 1 hour of direct individual/triadic supervisor contact each week	A maximum of 6 hours of supervision may be credited in a single week	2 units* are required for any week in which more than 10 hours of face-to-face psychotherapy is performed in each setting
Supervision, Group (Maximum of 8 in the group)	None	Same as above	Same as above
Total weeks of Supervised Experience Required	104 supervised weeks	None	Each week must contain a minimum of 1 unit* of supervision
Total hours of Supervised Experience Required	3,000 hours	None	A maximum of 40 hours credited in any week

\*One unit of supervision equals one hour of individual or triadic supervision or two hours of group supervision.

## REQUIRED FORMS

While gaining your hours of experience you must use the following forms, available under the “Applicants” tab of the Board’s website. These forms may change in the future, so be sure to stay up to date on current requirements.

Responsibility Statement for Supervisors of an APCC form: Your supervisor must sign this form prior to commencing supervision and provide you with the original. Retain for future submission with your Application for Licensure.

Supervisory Plan: Your supervisor must complete and sign this form prior to commencing supervision and provide you with the original. Retain for future submission with your Application for Licensure.

Weekly Summary of Experience Hours (Weekly Log): Log your hours on this form on a weekly basis and have your supervisor sign weekly. You will retain the original logs. Do not submit Weekly Logs to the Board except upon request.

Experience Verification form: This form is completed upon the termination of your supervised experience with your supervisor, and must indicate the total hours completed in each category under your supervisor, your supervisor’s license information and information about your employer. Your supervisor will sign the form and provide you with the original for submission with your Application for Licensure.

Written Oversight Agreement: When your supervisor is not employed by your employer or is a volunteer, your employer and supervisor must sign an agreement that specifies certain responsibilities of each party. An example agreement is available under the “Applicant” tab

of the Board's website. Be sure to retain a copy for future submission with your Application for Licensure.

### **For More Information On Supervised Experience Requirements**

All of the requirements in this section are explained in greater detail within the FAQs for APCCs (visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on "Applicant" on the top bar, then click "LPCC," then "Forms/Pubs," choose "Publications," then click on the document under "Supervision") and in the Board's Statutes and Regulations (visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on "Statutes & Regulations" on the left side of the blue bar at the bottom of the page).

## **Part 4: Applying For Licensure And The Clinical Exam**

### **Qualifying For Licensure: The Process**

After you have completed your supervised experience, any additional coursework (if required), and have passed the California Law and Ethics Exam, you may submit an Application for Licensure. The Board will notify you once your application has been evaluated and will provide instructions on how to proceed if approved, or how to clear up any deficiencies if not approved.

### **Taking The Clinical Exam**

Once your Application for Licensure is approved, you may sign up to take the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Exam (NCMHCE) through the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC). You must take the exam within one year from the date your Application for Licensure is approved. The "Exams" tab of the Board's website includes a link to the Candidate Handbook, which contains the exam's content outline.

### **If You Fail The Clinical Exam**

You can retake the exam after the waiting period specified in the Candidate Handbook. You will have a one-year deadline to retake the exam from the date of your last attempt. If you don't meet this one-year deadline your application is considered abandoned and you will be required to submit a new Application for Licensure.

Tip: Keep track of your one-year deadline for taking or retaking the clinical exam. If you miss your deadline, you will have to reapply for licensure and pay another application fee.

### **Once You Pass The Clinical Exam**

Upon passing the clinical exam, you may apply to have your LPCC license issued by applying on the BreEZe system, or submitting an Application for Initial License Issuance and fee. Allow up to 30 days for processing. Once issued, your LPCC license number will be posted to the BreEZe system online at [www.breeze.ca.gov](http://www.breeze.ca.gov) and you will receive the actual wall license and certificate in the mail. You may not practice independently until your license has been issued.

### **Authorization To Assess And Treat Couples And Families**

If you would like to be permitted to assess and treat couples and families as an LPCC, you will need to apply for authorization from the Board and provide a copy of this authorization to couple and family clients. For more information, see the LPCC Couples and Families

Requirements FAQ: Visit [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov), then click on the “LPCC” button in the middle of the homepage; click “Get a License” in the dropdown menu, click “Forms/Pubs,” choose “Forms,” then scroll to the document under “Assessment and Treatment of Couples and Families.”

### **Maintaining Your License**

Your LPCC license will expire every two years. During each two-year renewal cycle, you will need to complete 36 hours of continuing education and pay a renewal fee. The 36 hours must include six hours specific to law and ethics, and if you have received authorization to assess and treat couples and families, you must complete six hours specific to marriage and family therapy each renewal cycle.

Tip: Once you are licensed, pay close attention to your specific continuing education (CE) requirements, and make sure your courses are taken from an acceptable provider. The Board audits for CE periodically, and you can be fined if your courses do not meet the requirements.

### **Part 5: Resources**

#### **BBS WEBSITE**

[www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov)

#### **BBS EMAIL SUBSCRIBER LIST**

[www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php](http://www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php)

(search “BBS email alerts” at [www.dca.ca.gov](http://www.dca.ca.gov))

#### **BBS FACEBOOK**

[www.facebook.com/BehavioralSciencesBoardCA](https://www.facebook.com/BehavioralSciencesBoardCA)

#### **BBS TWITTER**

[https://twitter.com/BBS\\_California](https://twitter.com/BBS_California)

#### **BBS NEWSLETTER**

[www.bbs.ca.gov/resources/general.html](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/resources/general.html)

#### **CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF LICENSED**

#### **PROFESSIONAL CLINICAL COUNSELORS**

<https://calpcc.org>

#### **AMERICAN COUNSELING ASSOCIATION**

[www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)

#### **NATIONAL BOARD OF CERTIFIED COUNSELORS**

[www.nbcc.org](http://www.nbcc.org)

## FINANCIAL AID AND LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAMS

[www.bbs.ca.gov/resources/general.html](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/resources/general.html)

Board of Behavioral Sciences

California Department of Consumer Affairs

Rev: 8/20

PDE\_20-166

