

# WHO ARE LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS

## Who are licensed professional counselors?

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 level 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 90,000 professional counselors are licensed or certified in 48 states and the District of Columbia. LPC education and training standards for licensure are on par with those of the other two master’s level mental health providers - marriage and family therapists and clinical social workers. 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 supervised clinical experience, performed within two years, and periodic completion 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 addictions; 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 established, research-based “talk therapies” 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



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nursing provide the majority of mental health services in the U.S.

## How to Find a Counselor

In order to find a counselor in your community, you can visit the American Counseling Association's website at: [www.counseling.org/counselors/Directory.aspx](http://www.counseling.org/counselors/Directory.aspx)

You can also contact your state's counselor licensing board by visiting: [www.counseling.org/Counselors/](http://www.counseling.org/Counselors/)

By clicking on Licensure & Certification and selecting State Requirements you can find information on how to contact your state's licensing board.

## Need for Services

- Mental illnesses rank first among illnesses that cause disability in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. In any given year, about 5% to 7% of adults have a serious mental illness and a similar percentage of children - about 5% to 9% - have a serious emotional disturbance. — *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*, Executive Summary (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003)
- A recent study found that roughly one in five service members surveyed 3-12 months post-deployment to Iraq met the screening criteria for PTSD, depression, or anxiety. *Testimony before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee* (Col. Charles Hoge, M.D., United States Army Chief of Psychiatry and Behavior Services at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, July 27, 2005)

- In 2004, there were an estimated 21.4 million adults aged 18 or older with serious psychological distress; less than half received treatment. — *The 2004 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings*, Chapter 8 "Prevalence and Treatment of Mental Health Problems" (SAMHSA, 2005)
- Less than half of the children and one-third of the adults who have a diagnosable mental disorder receive treatment in any one year. — *Mental health: A Report of the Surgeon General* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999)
- Although prevalence of mental illness is estimated to be about equal in rural and urban areas, about 8 million rural residents lack access to mental health professionals. — *Sorrow Plain and Hollow* (Olsson, Karen, U.S. News and World Report, November 27, 2000)

## Effectiveness of Counseling

- "The [President's New Freedom] Commission [on Mental Health] recognizes that thousands of dedicated, caring, skilled providers staff and manage the service delivery system. The Commission does not attribute the shortcomings and failings of the contemporary system to a lack of professionalism or compassion of mental health care workers. . . . In short, the Nation must replace unnecessary institutional care with efficient, effective community services that people can count on." — *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*, Executive Summary (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003)

- A study published in 2002 titled "Family-Based Prevention Counseling for High-Risk Young Adolescents: Immediate Outcomes" found that after family-based counseling was conducted study participants showed significant improvement in self-concept, drug use attitudes, and school anti-social behavior. (Hogue, et al., *Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1-22 (2002))
- According to "A Naturalistic Longitudinal Evaluation of Counseling in Primary care", after patients were provided counseling there was a significant reduction in severity of symptoms for anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and quality of life. (Baker, et al., *Counseling Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 4, pp. 359-373(2002))
- 57% of former prisoners who received drug treatment and aftercare remained arrest-free after 42 months, in comparison with only 25% of the control group. (Leukefield, et al., *Treatment of Drug Offenders: Policies and Issues*, pp. 204-216 (2002))

## Resources

American Counseling Association  
5999 Stevenson Avenue  
Alexandria, VA 22304  
Toll Free: 800-347-6647  
[www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)



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