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Application Process to Apply for Initial Licensure as a Professional Counselor

The Rules and Regulations can be located on the Board’s website at
www.dos.state.pa.us/social.

These FAQs are not intended to substitute for reading the Rules and Regulations.

Q: Are the State Board of Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors (Board), Board Counsel and/or the Board Administrator and Board Staff permitted to provide legal advice?

A: No. Neither the Board’s Act nor regulations confer authority on the Board to issue advisory opinions, provide legal advice to outside persons or entities, pre-determine whether or what type of authorization to practice is required in order to be able to lawfully engage in an activity, or otherwise pre-approve/disapprove specific conduct. If you have a legal question, you should confer with a privately retained attorney.

Q: What is legal advice?

A: Legal advice is any written or oral counsel regarding a legal matter that impacts the responsibilities and rights of the person who receives it. Legal advice includes advisory opinions and interpretation of statutes or law.

Q: Can I provide teletherapy to clients in Pennsylvania or any other state?

A: The Board does not currently have regulations on teletherapy. However, the Board does require licensure when providing services in the State of Pennsylvania. If the person is physically located outside of the state at the time the services are being rendered, you would need to contact the state where the individual is located. You can also check with your national association (ACA) as the Board does expect licensees to act in accordance with the code of ethics and practice standards of that organizations.

Q: Does the Board issue a temporary license to practice in the state of Pennsylvania if I am licensed in another state?

A: No. Neither the Board’s Act nor regulations allow the Board to issue a temporary license to licensees from another state to practice in the State of Pennsylvania. However, if an applicant submits an application for licensure by endorsement under Act 41, they may be granted a provisional license at the discretion of the Board.

Q: What is Act 76 of 2018?

A: Act 76 of 2018 prohibits the independent practice of clinical social work, marriage and family therapy and professional counseling without a license as a clinical social worker (LCSW), marriage and family therapist (LMFT), or professional counselor (LPC). “Independent practice” means that the individual 1) styles themselves as a clinical social worker, marriage and family therapist or professional counselor; 2) regulates and is responsible for his or her own practice and treatment procedures; and 3) is not affiliated with any other practice, health care facility, government agency or government-regulated social service agency.

Professional counselors in independent clinical practice who, *prior to October 27, 2018*, began actively working towards licensure as a professional counselor by accumulating the required 3,000 hours of “supervised clinical experience” as set forth in the Board’s regulations at 49 Pa. Code § 49.13(b) are not considered to be engaging in “independent

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practice” and will be permitted to complete their experience requirements for licensure as a professional counselor and to obtain the professional counselor license.

These professional counselors must have been receiving the necessary supervision by a supervisor who meets the Board’s regulations in “Qualifications for Supervisors” as outlined in 49 Pa. Code § 49.3 and the “Standards for Supervisors” as outlined in 49 Pa. Code § 49.14. These practitioners must continue to receive the required supervision until they are issued a license to practice professional counseling by the Board.

Q: Did Act 76 change the scope of practice for professional counselors?

A: Yes. Please review Section 3 of the Board’s Act which defines Practice of Professional Counseling to see the current scope of practice of professional counselors.

Q: Under Act 76, am I permitted to engage in independent practice if I completed my education to obtain a license to practice professional counseling and I am working towards completing the 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience?

A: Refer to Section 3 of the Act for definition of independent practice.

Q: Where can I find the application for licensure as a professional counselor?

A: You will need to apply for the license on-line at www.pals.pa.gov. You will need to register and then you will be able to log in and apply for the license.

Q: How do I know if my education meets Pennsylvania’s requirements?

A: You must meet **ONE** of the following education requirements under Section 7(f) (2) Act 136 – 1998 (on website www.dos.state.pa.us/social - click on Rules and Regulations, Chapter 49 (Licensure of Professional Counselors). Request the school to send an official transcript of your educational degree and other graduate level coursework **DIRECTLY** to the Board.

a. Has successfully completed a planned program of 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours of graduate coursework in counseling or a field related to the practice of professional counseling, including a master’s degree granted on or before June 30, 2009, in counseling or a field determined by the board by regulation to be closely related to the practice of professional counseling, from an accredited educational institution, and has met specific course requirements listed in Section 49.2.

ATTENTION APPLICANTS WITH LESS THAN A 48 SEMESTER OR 72 QUARTER HOURS MASTER’S DEGREE IN PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING OR A RELATED FIELD:

An applicant with less than a 48 semester or 72 quarter hours master’s degree may qualify for licensure if the master’s degree was completed on or before June 30, 2009. The additional hours needed to reach the required 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours in a planned program may be completed after the granting of the master’s degree.

b. Has successfully completed a planned program of 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours of graduate coursework in counseling or a field determined by the board by regulation to be closely related to the practice of professional counseling, including a 48-semester-hour or 72-quarter-hour master’s degree in counseling or a field determined by the board by regulation to be closely related to the practice of

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professional counseling, from an accredited educational institution, and has met specific course requirements listed in Section 49.2.

- c. Holds a doctoral degree in counseling from an accredited educational institution or holds a doctoral degree in a field determined by the board by regulation to be closely related to the practice of professional counseling from an accredited educational institution, and has met specific course requirements listed in Section 49.2

Q: What coursework must my degree contain?

A: The following coursework is required as per Section 49.2 of the regulations (the regulations may be located on the Board’s website at www.dos.state.pa.us/social):

- (1) **Human growth and development** (2 semester or 3 quarter hours) studies that provide an understanding of the nature and needs of individuals at all developmental stages.
- (2) **Social and cultural foundations** (2 semester or 3 quarter hours) studies that provide an understanding of issues and trends in a multicultural and diverse society.
- (3) **Helping relationships** (2 semester or 3 quarter hours) studies that provide an understanding of counseling and consultation processes.
- (4) **Group Work** (2 semester or 3 quarter hours) studies that provide an understanding of group development, dynamics, counseling theories, group counseling methods and skills and other group approaches.
- (5) **Career and lifestyle development** (2 semester or 3 quarter hours) studies that provide an understanding of career development and related life factors.
- (6) **Appraisal** (2 semester or 3 quarter hours) studies that provide an understanding of individual and group approaches to assessment and evaluation.
- (7) **Research and program evaluation** (2 semester or 3 quarter hours) studies that provide an understanding of types of research methods, basic statistics, and ethical and legal considerations in research.
- (8) **Professional orientation** (2 semester or 3 quarter hours) studies that provide an understanding of all aspects of professional functioning, including history, roles, organizational structures, ethics, standards and credentialing.
- (9) **Clinical instruction** (Includes 100 clock hours of supervised practicum experience and 600 clock hours of supervised internship experience). The supervised internship experience shall begin after completion of the supervised practicum experience. Until March 2, 2007, this requirement may be satisfied by completion of a total of 6 semester hours or 9 quarter hours of practicum/internship experience (Currently, the Board is accepting completion of either 100 clock hours of supervised practicum experience and 600 clock hours of supervised internship experience OR completion of a total of 6 semester hours or 9 quarter hours of practicum/internship experience.)

Q: I hold less than a 48-semester credit or 72 quarter credit masters degree. Am I eligible for licensure?

A: Yes, only if you have successfully completed a planned program of 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours of graduate coursework in counseling or a field related to the practice of professional counseling, including a master’s degree granted on or before June 30, 2009, in counseling or a field determined by the board by regulation to be closely related to the practice of professional counseling, from an accredited educational institution, and has met specific course requirements listed in Section 49.2.

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An applicant with less than a 48 semester or 72 quarter hours master’s degree may qualify for licensure if the master’s degree was completed on or before June 30, 2009. The additional hours needed to reach the required 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours in a planned program may be completed after the granting of the master’s degree.

Q: What examination do I have to take and pass in order to be eligible for licensure as a professional counselor?

A: The Board accepts 7 acceptable examinations as listed in Section 49.11 of the regulations.

- (1) The National Counselor Examination for Licensure and Certification (NCE) give by NBCC.
- (2) The Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) Examination given by CRCC.
- (3) The Art Therapy Credentials Board (ATCB) Certification Examination given by ATCB.
- (4) The Board Certification Examination given by CBMT.
- (5) The practice examination of psychological knowledge given by the North American Association of Master’s in Psychology (NAMP).
- (6) The Advanced Alcohol & Other Drug Abuse Counselor Examination (AAODA) given by the International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium/Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Inc. (IC & RC/AODA).
- (7) The Examination for Master Addictions Counselors (EMAC) given by NBCC.

Q: When may I begin accruing my 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience?

A: *As of October 27, 2018*, Act 76 requires an applicant for licensure as a marriage and family therapist or for licensure as a professional counselor to complete at least 3,000 hours of “supervised clinical experience” AFTER being granted a master’s degree. Prior to the enactment of Act 76 of 2018, supervised clinical experience could be accumulated after the completion of 48 semester hours or 72 quarter hours of graduate coursework.

An individual who has met the educational requirements of Section 49.13(a)(3)(i) or (ii), as a professional counselor and has started accruing their 3,000 hours of “supervised clinical experience” after the completion of 48 semester hours or 72 quarter hours of graduate level coursework, *but prior to Act 76’s effective date on October 27, 2018*, will be permitted to continue their supervised clinical experience towards licensure and to obtain a license as a professional counselor. Please be advised that the clinical instruction (practicum and internship) requirement of Section 49.2(9) of the regulations cannot be counted towards the 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience.

An individual pursuing licensure as a professional counselor that has not started accruing their supervised clinical experience hours *prior to the effective date of Act 76 on October 27, 2018*, will need to obtain their master’s degree prior to accruing the 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience.

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Q: How many hours of supervised clinical experience are required and how long do I have to complete my hours for licensure as a professional counselor?

A: 3000 hours of supervised clinical experience are required. Under Section 49.13(b)(9) of the regulations: **The supervised clinical experience shall be completed in no less than 2 years and no more than 6 years.** (The Board has waived the requirement that no less than 500 hours and no more than 1,800 hours may be credited in any 12-month period.)

Q: How many clinical hours per week must I work in order for the supervised clinical experience to be accepted?

A: Under Section 49.13(b)(8) of the regulations; supervised work activity will be counted toward satisfying the experience requirement only

- if it takes place in a single setting for at least 30 hours per week but no more than 40 hours per week during at least a 3-month period
- OR at least 15 hours per week for a period of at least 6 months.

Q: How many hours per week must I meet with my supervisor?

A: Under Section 49.13(b)(5) of the regulations; the supervisor, or one to whom supervisory responsibilities have been delegated, shall meet with the supervisee for a minimum of 2 hours for every 40 hours of supervised clinical experience. At least 1 of the 2 hours shall be with the supervisee individually and in person, and 1 of the 2 hours may be with the supervisee in a group setting and in person. A total of 150 hours of supervision is required. At least 75 hours must be individual supervision and the other 75 hours may be group supervision.

Example: For every 40 hours of clinical experience you must have at least 1 hour of individual supervision and 1 hour may be group supervision or individual supervision.

Example: If working 20 hours per week – 1 week you must have 1 hour of individual supervision and the next week you may have one hour of group supervision.

Q: How long do I have to complete my 3000 hours of supervised clinical experience?

A: Under Section 49.13(b)(9) of the regulations – The supervised clinical experience shall be completed in no less than 2 years and no more than 6 years. (The Board has waived the requirement that no less than 500 hours and no more than 1,800 hours may be credited in any 12-month period.)

Q: What duties must my supervised clinical experience contain?

A: Under Section 49.13(b)(1) of the regulations: At least 1,500 hours (one-half of the 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience) shall consist of providing services in one or more of the following areas:

- (i) Assessment
- (ii) Counseling
- (iii) Therapy
- (iv) Psychotherapy
- (v) Other therapeutic interventions (psycho-education)
- (vi) Consultation
- (vii) Family therapy
- (viii) Group therapy

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Please note the above 8 experiences should involve direct client contact. The remainder of the clinical experience must be related to work with clients. **Example: case documentation and recordkeeping activities; court testimony related to work with client(s); advocacy on behalf of client(s); other activities that involve, support or enhance work with clients.**

Please be advised that administrative duties cannot be counted towards the 3000 hours of supervised clinical experience. Example: administrative supervision of another individual, completing human resource and/or budget documentation, etc.

Please refer to Section 49.13(b) of the regulations for the supervised clinical experience requirements.

Q: What are the qualifications for a supervisor to supervise the 3000 hours of supervised clinical experience?

A: For supervised clinical experience completed after January 1, 2006, 1500 hours must be completed under an individual who holds a current license as a professional counselor and has 5 years of experience within the last 10 years as a professional counselor (Section 49.3(1)) and the other 1500 hours may be completed under an individual who holds a current license and has at least a master’s degree in a related field and has 5 years of experience within the last 10 years in that field (Section 49.3(2)), as per Section 49.13(b)(2) of the regulations. A related field is defined in Section 49.1 of the regulations.

For supervised clinical experience completed prior to January 1, 2006, 1500 hours must be completed either under an individual who holds a current license as a professional counselor and has 5 years of experience within the last 10 years as a professional counselor (Section 49.3(1)) OR under an individual who practiced as a professional counselor and has 5 years of experience within the last 10 years as a professional counselor (Section 49.3(3)). The other 1500 hours may be completed under an individual who holds a current license and has at least a master’s degree in a related field and has 5 years of experience within the last 10 years in that field (Section 49.3(2)), as per Section 49.13(b)(2) of the regulations. A related field is defined in Section 49.1 of the regulations.

Supervised clinical experience completed in another state may be counted towards meeting the Pennsylvania supervised clinical experience requirements if the experience meets Pennsylvania requirements.

Please also refer to Section 49.14 of the regulations for the Standards for Supervisors.

Q: What documentation am I required to maintain while I am completing my supervised clinical experience?

A: You and your supervisor must maintain records as defined in Section 49.14(Standards for supervisors). You and your supervisor would devise a form to use to maintain your records. The Board may request these records if it becomes necessary.

Q: How many individuals completing the supervised clinical experience requirements may a supervisor supervise?

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A: Under Section 49.13(b)(6) of the regulations – A supervisor shall supervise no more than 6 supervisees at the same time. If this provision creates an undue hardship on a supervisee, the supervisor and supervisee may request an exception to this provision. The request shall state, in writing, the reasons why this provision creates a hardship on the supervisee and why the supervisee is not able to obtain a supervisor who meets the requirements of this provision. **Please be advised that in certain circumstances the Board may require a personal appearance by the supervisee and supervisor.**

Q: If I am unable to locate my supervisor or my supervisor is deceased, how do I have my supervised clinical experience verified?

A: If you do not hold a professional counselor license in another state, you can have another individual who can attest to the fact that the supervised clinical experience has occurred, submit the following documentation:

- (1) A notarized statement by the applicant indicating why the supervisor cannot complete the supervised clinical experience forms.
- (2) A notarized statement, by the individual attesting to your supervised clinical experience, indicating how that individual can verify that the supervised clinical experience occurred and indicating why that individual is completing the supervised clinical experience forms instead of your supervisor.
- (3) The supervised clinical experience forms, completed by the individual attesting to your supervised clinical experience, indicating your supervisor’s name and qualifications and all other documentation.

If you hold a professional counselor license in another state, you may request that copies of the supervised clinical experience on file with the other State Board be forwarded to the PA State Board for review.

Q: What is Act 41?

A: Act 41 is an alternative path to licensure by endorsement for people licensed in good standing in another state if they don’t meet the Board’s current endorsement requirements. It states that the Board SHALL issue a license if a licensee (1) holds a current license from another state whose licensure requirements are substantially equivalent to or exceed the requirements established in the Commonwealth (2) demonstrates competency in the profession through methods determined by the Board such as CE or been in practice for 2 of the last 5 years preceding the date of the application (3) has not committed any act that constitutes grounds for refusal, suspension or revocation of a license unless the board determines that the act should not be an impediment to licensure (4) is in good standing in the other jurisdiction and (5) pays fees established by the licensing board.

Q: I am licensed in another state as a professional counselor. What is the procedure for licensure under Act 41?

A: You will need to for the license on-line at www.pals.pa.gov. Please note that you must hold a license in good standing as a professional counselor in another state and have been actively engaged in the practice of professional counseling for 2 of the last 5 years in any state or territory in the United States immediately preceding the filing of this application for licensure by endorsement under Act 41. All applicants from another country will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

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Q: Are professional counselors permitted to write Emotional Support Animal Requests?

A: A professional counselor must work within their scope of practice as defined in Section 3 of the law and may only provide services that are within the competency areas for which an individual is qualified by education, training and experience. Please refer to the Code of Ethics in Section 49.72(a)(2)