

Key Terms Important to Moving the Addiction Counseling Licensing Effort Forward

By Kirk Bowden, PhD, MAC, NCC, LPC, NAADAC President

Addiction counselor licensing is vitally important to the future and health of our profession. As such, NAADAC has been working vigorously to keep the topic in the national eye. However, addiction counseling licensing cannot be accomplished at the national level. Licensing is a state-specific issue that NAADAC and its affiliates must address on a state-by-state basis. State statutes require the state's legislature to pass legislation to enact the licensing, or to change the name of an existing license title, or to add addiction counseling-specific education and training requirements.

NAADAC plans to continue this effort until all 50 states have addiction counselor licensing. NAADAC also seeks to increase the standardization of licensing among states. Currently, approximately half of the states have an addiction counseling license. The remaining states have various forms of counselor certification. Mandatory addiction counseling education requirements vary greatly from state to state, with some states requiring as little as a GED and 300 clock hours of training, while other states require as much as a 60 credit hour Master's Degree. Work experience requirements also vary, ranging from no experience requirements to requirements of several thousands of hours. Other behavioral health professions have far more licensing standardization from state to state. For example, Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Psychologists and Licensed Professional Counselors have a much higher level of standardization in their professional titles and licensing requirements from state to state. For the sake of the addiction counseling profession, it is essential that as a profession, we too obtain much greater standardization of licensing requirements and titles from state to state.

In order to move forward with these vital efforts, it is important for all addiction counselors and their advocates to understand the following key terms:

Licensure is the state-specific granting and regulating of licenses to engage in the practice of a specific activity. Simplistically, it is the granting of permission to participate in an activity that is otherwise forbidden. Two good examples of state-granted licenses are drivers' licenses and medical licenses. Obtaining a driver's license is mandatory to drive legally in a person's state of residence. The requirements to obtain a driver's license are state-specific and vary from state to state. Normally drivers' licenses are transferrable from state to state, and states are willing to grant temporary permission to drivers from other states to drive in their state for a specific period of time. In contrast, medical licenses are not



automatically transferrable from state-to-state. For example, when a doctor obtains a medical license in my home state of Arizona, that doctor is not automatically licensed to practice in any other state. If an Arizona doctor decides to practice in California, the doctor must first obtain a California medical license. Licenses are state-specific, not national. Each state grants and regulates licenses in their state as a state government privilege. Licenses are not a national privilege. If a person violates licensure laws, that person can be prosecuted under civil or criminal law.

A **professional license** grants a licensee the authority to use a specific professional title. Examples include the professional titles Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and

Licensed Independent Substance Abuse Counselor (LISAC). Normally professional licenses also grant the legal authority to practice in a specific profession and under a regulated scope of practice as defined in the statutes and/or rules of the state. As mentioned above, license requirements and scopes can vary greatly from state to state.

Credentials are normally a certificate or other form of documentation attesting to a person's qualifications. The terms credentials and licenses are frequently used interchangeably, but they are not synonymous terms.

A **national credential** is simply a credential issued by a national certification organization, like NAADAC and its National Certification Commission for Addiction Counselors (NCCAP); it is NOT a national license. A license must be issued by a state. I frequently hear people in our profession discuss the need for a national credential. Holding a national credential does not automatically translate into a state license. For example, NAADAC's Master of Addiction Counseling (MAC) certification is an outstanding national credential. The MAC is extremely valuable in attesting to an addiction professional's high level of qualifications, but it is not a license. National credentials are not a substitute nor can they replace the need for state-issued licenses. I have a MAC, which I am proud of, but the MAC does not give me the authority to practice addiction counseling in my state of Arizona. To practice, I must be licensed by the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners. The benefits of national credentials are described in Executive Director, Cynthia Moreno Tuohy's article in this issue of *Advances in Addiction & Recovery*.

Certification is normally a voluntary credential, offered by private organizations. A certification is a form of documentation attesting that

a person has met specific criteria established by a certification organization. This criteria normally include education requirements and the passing of an exam. A certification is not a state license and neither replaces a license, nor offers the same level of power, authority, and/or protection as a license within a state. A certification is not a granting of permission by a state but rather a documentation of specific qualifications.

Statutes are laws that are written and passed by legislative bodies of government.

Tiered licensing levels are the different levels of licensing required by states. Some states have a single level of licensing, while others have two or three tiers of licensing. A few states have a single level of mandatory licensing for counselors practicing independently and certification for counselors working under supervision.

Titles of licenses for addiction counselors vary from state to state. The currently preferred titles of licenses include “addiction counselor” in the title. However, many states have had counseling licensing for many years and use outdated titles. In my state of Arizona, we have tiered licensing, of which the highest level of counselor license is “Licensed Independent Substance Abuse Counselor (LISAC).” I have been actively advocating in my state to change the title to “Licensed Independent Addiction Counselor” or “Licensed Addiction and Substance Use Disorder Counselor.” Texas has a single level of counselor licensure, and titles its license “Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor (LCDC).” NAADAC encourages use of “Addiction Counselor” in the title of future state licenses. Note: the change of the title of a license is not a simple issue. The title is normally written in state statute and requires the passage of a bill by the state legislature.



In addition to serving as NAADAC's President, Kirk Bowden, PhD, MAC, NCC, LPC, serves on the Editorial Advisory Committee for Advances in Addiction & Recovery. While serving in many capacities for NAADAC through the years, Bowden also serves as Chair of the Addiction and Substance Use Disorder Program at Rio Salado College, consultant

and subject matter expert for Ottawa University, a past-president of the International Coalition for Addiction Studies Education (INCASE), and as a steering committee member for SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), Partners for Recovery, and the Higher Education Accreditation and Competencies expert panel for SAMHSA/CSAT. Bowden was recognized by the Arizona Association for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors as Advocate of the Year for 2010, and by the American Counseling Association for the Counselor Educator Advocacy Award in 2013, the Fellow Award in 2014, Outstanding Addiction/ Offender Professional Award in 2015, and most recently the California Association for Alcohol/ Drug Educators' Lifetime Achievement Award in 2015.



Make hope real

as an addiction counselor

Study with today's leading practitioners at the nation's largest nonprofit addiction treatment center. Residential and online degree programs available. Three convenient start dates throughout the year.

Hazelden Graduate School of Addiction Studies

Master of Arts programs available in addictions and co-occurring disorders counseling

hazelden.edu

651-213-4617



Hazelden Betty Ford
Foundation