

# Why Should I Get a National Credential?

By James “Kansas” Cafferty, LMFT, MAC, NCAAC, NCC AP Chair

## I have a state credential, so why should I get national credentials?

This is a question that we receive frequently as NCC AP Commissioners. I am about eight years into my term as a Commissioner and have discussed this question with countless individuals over the years. Even during the NAADAC and NCC AP Leadership Q&A at our recent virtual NAADAC 2021 Annual Conference, the chat box was inundated with various questions regarding state credentials and national credentials. Why are national credentials, like those offered by NCC AP, so important and why should you get one?

1. **Client protection.** Our clients – and prospective clients – are often lost in the sea of acronyms that are used in the addiction treatment profession. It is very difficult for them to discern who is a qualified addiction professional with the education and training to provide quality addiction treatment and who is not. Contrast this with, for example, a psychologist or an LCSW, where the terms are easily recognizable no matter where in the country you are. National credentials offer clients a degree of quality assurance, protection, and safety to explore their mental health issues. NCC AP wants and is working toward offering the same protections for those afflicted with a substance use disorder.
2. **Professional recognition.** Clients are not the only ones who are confused by all the credentials, certifications, and pseudo-credentials in our field. Even employers can sometimes be confused by all of this. NCC AP is steadfast in working toward making our credentials the most recognizable in the country. With this comes notoriety and professional respect for the counselors who carry them.
3. **Payor recognition.** The Master Addiction Counselor (MAC) credential has a history of being reimbursable by third-party payors across the country. In fact, in a study conducted by the Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (an association for third-party payors) and commissioned by SAMSHA, the MAC credential was the only national credential identified as qualifying for reimbursement by all plans surveyed (Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness, 2011). The MAC credential continues to be reimbursable by third-party payors, and many payors are increasingly recognizing NCC AP’s other credentials for reimbursement. The NCAC I and NCAC II credentials are reimbursable by many third-party payors as long as there is a Masters-level clinical supervisor involved. Even the NCPRSS credential is reimbursable in parts of the country! The use of these national credentials comes with quality assurance to payers who are justifiably confused by the alphabet soup of credentials in our field. Insurance companies run on algorithms; they are businesses that crave predictability as it impacts their bottom line and their shareholders. Consistent credentials are one of the single most effective ways to demonstrate the outcome differences for clients who are receiving quality addiction care versus subpar



care, and insurance companies want this so much that they are willing to pay for it. Just this week, in my private practice, I saw a client who submitted a claim to their insurance company (Medicare), and was told that my Marriage and Family Therapy License was not acceptable for reimbursement. It followed that my MAC credential was acceptable, which led to a very happy client.

4. **Higher counselor pay.** When the payors get in line and become predictable, so too do the small and large businesses we often work for. This creates a predictable environment for our own agencies, hospitals, and private businesses to make reasonable estimates about their income and budget. This stability is what leads to higher pay for counselors, something we all want. While we did not choose this profession for its reputation for lucrative earnings, we are as hard working as anyone in the world and deserve a rate of pay that is commensurate with our expertise.
5. **Portability.** NCC AP has worked hard in this area and our credentials and/or tests are accepted in or used by nearly every state in the country. In addition, they are accepted in countries all over the globe. Right now, our exams are being translated into 22 other languages and are becoming available to countless countries through our collaborative relationship with the U.S. State Department and Global Certification and Credentialing Commission, which now use NCC AP examinations worldwide. In addition, NCC AP accepts commensurate credentials for individuals to catwalk into the NCC AP career ladder without further examination. We look at other exams that draw from the same evidence-based practices NCC AP does, and use similar psychometric processes in their development, and we do what is right for the counselor by allowing reciprocity into NCC AP credentials. Rather than engage in petty one upmanship about whose exams are better, NCC AP made the

choice to make travel across state lines, and even international lines, much easier for well qualified persons who were able to demonstrate said expertise. To learn more about this, please visit the NCC AP website at [www.naadac.org/certification](http://www.naadac.org/certification).

Substance use disorder counseling is a wonderful profession and recognition for our special training and experience has come a very long way in the over 30 years that NCC AP has been credentialing people. The question of “why should I get a national credential?” has been answered above, but I want to also challenge the reader to consider one further reason: to be a part of the national movement. About 30 years ago, NCC AP became the first major entity to recognize drug use disorder counseling and alcohol use disorder as belonging to the same credential. Now it is unthinkable to do it any other way. The decisions made then and the progress made since then is because of all of you who got involved and joined in that movement. These individuals have

changed the field forever, for the better. It is plain to see the trajectory we are on and the momentum we are continually gaining. I leave you with the final thought: do you want to miss it or be in the center of it? Having a national credential puts you right in the middle of the movement, right where you belong.

**References**

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW). (2011, May). *Managed Behavioral Health Care Organization: Provider Credential and Information*. SAMHSA.



James “Kansas” Cafferty, LMFT, MAC, NCAAC, serves as the Chair to the National Certification for Addiction Professionals. He has been in the field of substance use disorder treatment since 1997, a year after he entered into recovery himself. He currently serves as the Clinical Director at the Aton Center, a residential treatment center based in the suburbs of San Diego, CA. He has been an active member of NAADAC for 15 years.



---

**RECOVERY RESILIENCE PROGRAM  
FACILITATOR CERTIFICATION**

The training course leads to a certification as a Recovery Resilience Program Facilitator, awarded by the I-System Institute for Transdisciplinary Studies, Utah State University.

The Recovery Resilience Program (RRP) is an evidence-based, person-centered and strength-based relapse prevention and recovery-oriented intervention designed for individuals in addiction recovery, that is adapted from Mind-Body Bridging.

The aim of participating in a RRP is for people in recovery to develop a recovery resilience practice that will strengthen their internal resources, therefore contributing to their overall recovery capital, as well as promoting flourishing.

The training is intended for mental health professionals, addiction counsellors, recovery coaches, and peer recovery support specialists which will enable them to present the RRP in four sessions in a group format or as part of individual counselling.

The cost of this online course is \$400 per individual.

Contact Guy du Plessis for more information  
[guy.duplessis@usu.edu](mailto:guy.duplessis@usu.edu)  
[i-system.usu.edu](http://i-system.usu.edu)



College of Humanities & Social Sciences  
I-System Institute  
UtahStateUniversity

# ADDICTION COUNSELING & PREVENTION

**Degrees Offered at USD**

4+

- Master of Arts
- Graduate Certificate
- Bachelor of Science
- Undergraduate Certificate
- Minor in Addiction

**Accessible**

Campus & Online

**Affordable**

Ranked “Best Return on Investment”



**Accredited**



NASAC

This program is accredited by the National Addiction Studies Accreditation Commission.

UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH DAKOTA**  
SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES

[usd.edu/acp](http://usd.edu/acp)