Counselor Criteria
Veteran’s Administration (VA) Medical Centers
Army Substance Abuse Program
and
TRICARE

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor

Public Law 109-461, which was enacted December 22, 2006, explicitly recognized both “licensed professional mental health counselors” and “marriage and family therapists” as mental health providers within the agency. On September 28, 2010, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a set of qualification standards for licensed professional mental health counselor (LPMHC) positions, as well as for marriage and family therapist positions.

1. Be a U.S. Citizen.
2. Have a master’s degree in counseling. The standards state that applicants must:
   “Hold a master’s degree in mental health counseling, or a related field, from a program accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Examples of related mental health counseling fields include, but are not limited to, Addiction Counseling; Community Counseling; Gerontology Counseling; Marital, Couple, and Family Counseling; and Marriage and Family Therapy. A doctoral degree in mental health counseling may not be substituted for the master’s degree in mental health counseling.”
3. Be licensed (e.g. LPC or LCAS?), or working toward licensure. The standards state that:
   “Persons hired or reassigned to LPMHC positions…must hold a full, current, and unrestricted license to independently practice mental health counseling, which includes diagnosis and treatment…. Non-licensed LPMHCs who otherwise meet the eligibility requirements may be given a temporary appointment as a graduate LPMHC…. The appointing official may waive the requirement of licensure for a period not to exceed 2 years for a LPMHC that provides care under the supervision of a licensed LPMHC at or above the full performance level. This exception only applies at the entry level (GS-9). For grade levels at or above the full performance level, the candidate must be licensed.”

What job titles and GS (general schedule) levels will be used for counselor positions?
The positions established by the VA include:
GS-9 Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor (Entry Level – for individuals with a graduate degree in counseling but who have not yet become licensed)
GS-11 Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor
GS-12 Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor Program Coordinator
GS-12 Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor Supervisor
GS-13 Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselor Program Manager
GS-14 LPMHC Program Manager Leadership Assignments
The GS levels established for these positions parallel those currently used for social workers.

Developed by Dr. Lloyd Goodwin 2-14-12
The counselor positions are established within the GS-101 “social science” series.

Source: Adapted from http://www.counseling.org/PublicPolicy

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

1. You must possess a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling, including an internship; or a master's degree in counseling psychology or a related field, including at least 30 semester hours of course work in such areas as foundations of rehabilitation counseling, human growth and development, job placement, case management, and medical/psycho-social aspects of disability. Requisite graduate study must have included a supervised internship/practicum.

   ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

2. One year of professional vocational rehabilitation counseling experience, equivalent to the GS-9 level in the federal service. Experience equivalent to the GS-9 level include providing a wide range of rehabilitation and personal adjustment counseling and case management services, including coordination of rehabilitation, training, and employment services to disabled veterans. Vocational rehabilitation counseling experience obtained prior to the completion of the requirements for the master's degree does not qualify for this experience. NOTE: If one year of work experience is credited for determining minimum qualifications, that year cannot also be used for determining grade level.

   OR

   In addition to meeting the basic requirements, you must possess 3 years of progressively higher levels of graduate education or a Ph.D. or equivalent doctoral degree in rehabilitation counseling or counseling psychology. One year of full-time graduate education is considered to be the number of credit hours that the school attended has determined to represent 1 year of full-time study. If that number cannot be obtained from the school, 18 semester hours should be considered an academic year of graduate study. Part-time graduate education is creditable in accordance with its relationship to a year of full-time study at the school attended. Additional information on the qualification requirements is outlined in the OPM Qualifications Standards Handbook of General Schedule Positions. It is available for your review on OPM's web site at http://www.opm.gov/qualifications.

Source: Adapted from http://usajobs.org/jobs/72095322/VOCATIONAL%20REHABILITATION%20COUNSELOR.htm

Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP)

1. Graduate degree from CACREP accredited counseling program.
2. State counseling license (e.g. LPC).
3. State substance abuse licensure/certification (e.g. LCAS/CSAC) must be obtained within 12 months of employment in ASAP.
4. Passage of the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Examination (NCMHCE). Must have graduate transcript in hand to take exam.
5. One year substance abuse counseling experience.
   
   • Counselors can search for open ASAP positions by going to www.usajobs.com and typing “Army substance abuse program” in the search text box.
• You can access a copy of the directive on the ACA website at www.counseling.org/publicpolicy and share it with Army HR staff if they are not aware of this new policy. Substance Abuse Counselor positions may be listed under counseling psychologist or social work titles.


TRICARE

The Department of Defense issued regulations at the end of 2011 (online at http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-12-27/pdf/2011-33109.pdf) which would let licensed professional counselors practice independently within TRICARE, the health care program providing services for an estimated 9.6 million active duty service members, retirees, and their families.

1. State counseling license (e.g. LPC)
2. Two years of post-master’s degree supervised mental health counseling practice which includes a minimum of 3,000 hours of supervised clinical practice and 100 hours of face-to-face supervision.
3. …and either:
   • Graduate degree from a CACREP mental health counseling program and have passed either the National Counselor Examination (NCE) or the National Clinical Mental Health Counselor Examination (NCMHCE)(must have graduate transcript in hand to take exam);
   or
   • Graduate degree from a mental health counseling program from a regionally accredited institution (e.g. SACS) and have passed the NCMHCE exam.

Beginning January 1, 2015, counselors applying to become a TRICARE participating provider would be recognized only if they have a degree from "a mental health counseling program of education and training" from a CACREP-accredited school, and have passed the NCMHCE. Counselors who have signed on as participating providers before 2015 under the transition period criteria listed above can continue to practice independently. Beginning 2015, counselors who didn't become certified under the transition period criteria and who don't meet the CACREP/NCMHCE requirements won't be reimbursable by TRICARE at all, even under physician referral and supervision.

Current Referral and Supervision Requirements Still In Effect

Although the rule stated that it was "effective" on December 27, 2011, it appears that counselors will not be able to see TRICARE beneficiaries independently for a few months. According to staff with the TRICARE Management Activity (TMA, the agency charged with managing the program), the Department of Defense is maintaining existing requirements for physician referral and supervision of counselors’ services until it has reviewed comments on the regulation and made any final changes in light of the comments it receives. Staff indicated that TMA expects to finish this process and begin implementing the regulations later this year.
ACA encourages counselors interested in this issue to submit comments. Comments must be submitted by February 27th. You can do this through the website http://www.regulations.gov. In the drop-down box in the middle of the page entitled "Select Document Type", select "Rule", and in the box next to it entitled "Enter Keyword or ID" type in "certified mental health counselors". Click "Search", and the top result listed on the page that comes up should be entitled "TRICARE: Certified Mental Health Counselors." You'll see a link for "Submit a Comment" on the right-hand side of the page.

ACA will be submitting comments as an organization, and we will be collaborating with both the National Board for Certified Counselors and the American Mental Health Counselors Association in developing our comments. ACA has worked closely with both NBCC and AMHCA over the years in advocating for independent practice authority for counselors within TRICARE.

Source: Adapted from http://www.counseling.org/PublicPolicy/LegislativeUpdate.aspx?AGuid=f8305b28-e6a2-4d38-8570-579a0bcf35fc