



National Association of Social Workers  
California Chapter (NASW-CA)

## **Steps to a California LCSW for Out-of-State LCSWs**

NASW-CA developed this document for individuals who hold a valid LCSW in another state and are interested in obtaining a California LCSW.

### **Employment as a Social Worker in California**

In California, individuals with either a BSW or MSW degree can be employed as a social worker without holding a license. However, to perform clinical social work and psychotherapy in California, the social worker must hold an MSW from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited school and obtain a California LCSW, the only social work license in California.

### **California LCSW License and Psychotherapy**

Clinical Social Work and Psychotherapy Defined by California Law

The following excerpt was copied from the *BBS Statutes and Regulations*, Chapter 14, 4996.9. Clinical Social Work and Psychotherapy Defined.

*The practice of clinical social work is defined as a service in which a special knowledge of social resources, human capabilities, and the part of unconscious motivation plays in determining behavior, is directed at helping people to achieve more adequate, satisfying, and productive social adjustments. The application of social work principles and methods includes, but is not restricted to, counseling and using applied psychotherapy of a non-medical nature with individuals, families, or groups; providing information and referral services; providing or arranging for the provision of social services; explaining or interpreting the psychosocial aspects in the situation of individuals, families, or groups; helping communities to organize, to provide, or to improve social or health services; or doing research related to social work.*

*Psychotherapy, within the meaning of this chapter (Chapter 14) is the use of psychosocial methods within a professional relationship, to assist the person or persons to achieve a better psychosocial adaptation, to acquire greater human realization of psychosocial potential and adaptation, to modify internal and external conditions which affect individuals, groups, or communities in respect to behavior, emotions, and thinking, in respect to their intrapersonal and interpersonal processes.*

### **The California Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS)**

The BBS is the licensing and regulatory body for California LCSWs, LMFTs, LPCCs, and LEPs. **Registrants are responsible for staying abreast of all licensing requirements, publications, and timeframes.**

BBS Website: [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov)

BBS Contacts: <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/contact.shtml>

BBS Subscriber List: Free e-mail service that provides automated updates.  
[www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php](http://www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php)

BBS Regulations: The BBS annually updates the *Statutes and Regulations Related to LCSWs, LMFTs, LEPs, and LPCCs*, in which Chapter 14 is specific to clinical social work.  
[www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf)

Change of Address: Once registered, any changes to name or address must be reported in writing to the BBS within 30 days. [www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml)

## Introduction to the California LCSW License

The BBS provides critical and timely information about the licensing process. Before beginning the process, applicants must understand the process, requirements, and timeframes.

LCSW License Requirements  
[www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs\\_requirement.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs_requirement.shtml)

Navigating the LCSW Process  
[http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs\\_presentation.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs_presentation.shtml)

LCSW Out of State Applicant Information  
[http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate\\_lcs.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate_lcs.shtml)

## Summary of Steps to a California LCSW for Out-of-State LCSWs

- Step 1: Determine if it is necessary to register as an associate social worker (ASW)
- Step 2: Meet California's clinical experience requirements
- Step 3: Pass the California Law and Ethics Exam
- Step 4: Complete required post-master's coursework
- Step 5: Determine if it is necessary to sit for ASWB Clinical Level Exam
- Step 6: Submit the LCSW Application Packet
- Step 7: If registered as an ASW, work under a qualified professional until licensed

### Step 1: Determine if it is necessary to register as an associate social worker (ASW)

Associate social worker (ASW) is a California designation used for MSWs and other applicants who are registered with the BBS and have received approval to perform clinical social work and psychotherapy **under** a qualified California licensed professional while they move through the licensing process.

Registering with the BBS as an ASW is only way in which applicants are allowed to perform psychotherapy and clinical social work as they move through the licensing process. As stated previously, California allows individuals with a BSW or MSW degree to be employed as a social worker; however, **if the out-of-state LCSW wants to perform psychotherapy with clients, he or she must register as an ASW and work under a qualified California licensed mental health professional until he or she obtains a California LCSW.**

#### Required California Law and Ethics Coursework

Applicants who hold a MSW degree from outside of California must obtain 18 hours of California law and professional ethics training through a BBS-recognized CE provider **prior** to registering as an ASW. If out-of-state LCSWs do not register as an ASW (they are not providing psychotherapy), they still must complete the 18 hour of California law and ethics coursework before sitting for the California Law and Ethics Exam. Applicants who earned an MSW degree from a California university are not mandated to obtain this training; however, depending on their knowledge base, they would be wise to seek out additional training or coursework specific to legal and ethical topics related to a California LCSW.

#### Complete the ASW Application

Before submitting the ASW application, the qualifying MSW degree must be posted to the official university transcript and questions about criminal history must be answered. If the ASW application is rejected by the BBS for any reason, the deficiencies must be corrected within one year of notification;

otherwise, the BBS abandons the file. Once obtained, registrants are responsible for renewing the ASW registration annually for up to six years.

- ASW Application: [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/aswapp.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/aswapp.pdf)
- Application Processing: [www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/index.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/index.shtml)
- Registrant Renew: [www.bbs.ca.gov/licensees/renewal\\_registrant.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/licensees/renewal_registrant.shtml)
- ASW/LCSW Forms: [www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml#lcs](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml#lcs)

## **Step 2: Meet California's Clinical Experience Requirements**

California does not have reciprocity with any other state licensing board; in fact, every state is very different in terms of social work employment and licenses. The following excerpt was copied from the BBS website and outlines the required experience for applicants holding a valid LCSW license from another state. For details, visit [www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate\\_lcs.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate_lcs.shtml).

### *Experience Requirement for Out-of-State LCSWs*

*The Board's statutes (Business and Professions Code Section 4996.17) set forth different requirements depending on how long you have held a clinical social worker license in another state. If you have been licensed as a clinical social worker in another state for at least four years, you have met the Board's experience requirements for licensure. You will document this with the Clinical Social Worker Verification of Licensure/Registration/Certification in another state form. This form is available in the LCSW application packet.*

*If you have been licensed as a clinical social worker in another state for less than four years, you must provide verification that you completed 3,200 hours of supervised work experience and 104 weeks of supervision. If the licensing body in your state does not have equivalent requirements, time actively licensed as a clinical social worker in your state shall be accepted at a rate of 100 hours per month up to a maximum of 1,200 hours. You will document this with the Clinical Social Worker Verification of Licensure/Registration/Certification in another state form. This form is available in the LCSW application packet.*

## **Step 3: Pass the California Law and Ethics Exam**

### Overview of the California LCSW Process

All LCSW candidates must pass the California Law and Ethics Exam, meet the required clinical experience, and obtain the required post-master's coursework *before* applying with the BBS to sit for the ASWB Clinical Level Exam. **In the case of many out-of-state LCSWs, they have already passed the ASWB Clinical Level Exam and will not be required to pass this again.** After passing the ASWB Clinical Level Exam, applicants submit the LCSW application packet.

- BBS Exam News: [http://www.bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam\\_news.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam_news.shtml)

### The California Law and Ethics Exam

All applicants who are registered as ASWs must sit for the California Law and Ethics Exam prior to their first ASW renewal. Out-of-state LCSW applicants must also pass the California Law and Ethics Exam prior to submitting the LCSW Application. Applicants first apply to the BBS, and once the BBS deems them eligible to sit for the exam, applicants can schedule an exam date through PSI, who administers the California Law and Ethics Exam. Applicants must take the Law and Ethics Exam at least once per year until receiving a passing score.

- Initial Exam Application: [http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/registrant\\_initial\\_law-ethic\\_exam\\_request.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/registrant_initial_law-ethic_exam_request.pdf)

- Exam Preparation: <http://www.naswca.org/?page=A9>
- Exam Related Forms and Publications: [http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml#exam\\_related](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml#exam_related)

#### Failing the California Law and Ethics Exam

Registrants, who fail the Law and Ethics Exam, may apply with the BBS to retake the exam **after** the required waiting period and **after** completing at least 12 additional hours of California law and ethics coursework through a BBS-recognized provider.

- NASW-CA Online Program offers the mandated law and ethics coursework  
<https://www.socialworkweb.com/#/s/caprelawandethics>

#### **Step 4: Complete Required Post-Master's Coursework**

Applicants can obtain the required post-master's coursework through online or in-person events, as long as the training is offered through a BBS-recognized CE provider. The required coursework can also be met if a specific course appears on an official transcript, or the applicant provides a formal letter from a California MSW Program indicating a specific course meets the requirements. When filing the LCSW application packet, registrants must submit the original copies of the certificates of completion for each course. For details, visit [http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate\\_lcs.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate_lcs.shtml).

- Child Abuse Assessment and Reporting (7 hours) *Must be specific to California laws*
- Human Sexuality (10 hours)
- Alcoholism and Other Chemical Substance Dependency (15 hours)
- Spousal or Partner Abuse Assessment, Detection, and Intervention (15-hours)
- Aging, Long Term Care, and Elder/Dependent Adult Abuse (10 Hours)  
*Pertains to applicants who entered a MSW degree program on or after 1/1/2004.*

#### Coursework Resources

- Approved Post-Master's Coursework: <https://www.socialworkweb.com/nasw/#/s/home>
- BBS-Recognized CE Providers: [http://bbs.ca.gov/licensees/ce\\_licensees.shtml](http://bbs.ca.gov/licensees/ce_licensees.shtml)

#### **Step 5: Determine if it is necessary to take the ASWB Clinical Level Exam**

After passing the California Law and Ethics Exam, providing proof of clinical experience and obtaining the required post-master's coursework, applicants can apply to sit for the ASWB Clinical Level Exam. **As stated previously, if the applicant has already passed the ASWB Clinical Level Exam, they generally do not have to retake this exam.** Details can be found in the Licensed Clinical Social Worker Examination Eligibility Application Packet at: <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcsapp.pdf>.

#### **Step 6: Submit the LCSW Application Packet**

After passing (or providing proof of passing) the ASWB Clinical Level Exam, applicants can submit the LCSW application packet. When the application is complete, it is recommended that applicants make a copy of the entire application packet, store it in a safe place, and place the application, fee, and the originals of all required documents in one envelope. Send the envelope as "certified mail," so that there is a receipt indicating the date the BBS receives the envelope. Download the LCSW application from the BBS website at: <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml#asw-lcs>.

## **Step 7: If Registered as an ASW, Work under a Qualified Professional until Licensed**

ASW registrants must be supervised by a California licensed mental health professional who assumes legal responsibility for their work *until* the ASW receives his or her California LCSW. The registrant and supervisor should keep in mind that courts expect both parties to do the following: demonstrate sufficient and appropriate supervision activity; meet all legal and professional standards; and provide services that meet the California standard of care. In the case of a lawsuit, all parties will be held accountable.

### **The Most Common Registrant Errors**

According to the BBS, approximately 50% of all registrants fall out of the licensing process. The most common errors made by applicants include the following:

- Failing to understand California's licensing process prior to beginning the process.
- Failing to utilize the BBS website to research licensing requirements and timeframes.
- Failing to be proactive and take full responsibility for the process and requirements.
- Failing to accurately complete the appropriate BBS applications and forms, or not submitting originals when required; therefore, causing lengthy delays.
- Failing to annually renew their ASW registration, or failing to sit for the California Law and Ethics Exam prior to their first ASW renewal.
- Failing to find appropriate work settings or failing to receive adequate supervision; therefore, not gaining sufficient clinical experience.
- Failing to track hours of experience and clinical supervision utilizing the form provided by the BBS.
- Failing to complete the required 3200 hours of experience within the six-year timeframe and assuring that 1700 of these hours are gained under an LCSW.
- Failing to adequately prepare for the two LCSW exams by accessing all exam handbooks and material and using this information to assess their knowledge regarding the exam content.
- Failing to file a written change in name or address with the BBS within 30-days of the change.
- Failing to complete all of the required coursework through BBS-recognized CE providers and keeping the original certificates of completion.
- Failing to sit for an exam at least once each year until the exam is passed.
- Failing to understand that the LCSW licensing process can take an average of four to six years to complete and may involve one to four different clinical supervisors.

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