



National Association of Social Workers ~ California Chapter

## **Steps to a California LCSW for MSW Applicants**

NASW-CA developed this document for MSW students and graduates who may pursue a California LCSW license and MSWs who are currently registered with the licensing board.

### **Social Work Employment and the LCSW License in California**

Employment as a Social Worker in California

In California, individuals with either a BSW or MSW can be employed as social workers without holding a social work license. 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.

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.*

Licensing Requirements Vary from State to State

Social work licensing requirements vary significantly from state to state. To view licensing requirements for each state, visit the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) website at: <https://www.aswb.org/licensees/about-licensing-and-regulation/social-work-regulation/>.

### **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 changes and new regulations.

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)

## **The California LCSW Licensing Process**

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

1. Brief Overview of the LCSW License Requirements  
[www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs\\_requirement.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs_requirement.shtml)
2. Navigating the LCSW License Process  
[www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs\\_presentation.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs_presentation.shtml)

### **Summary of the Steps to a LCSW**

- Step 1: Register as an Associate Social Worker (ASW)
- Step 2: Find an Appropriate Work Setting and a Qualified Supervisor
- Step 3: Sit for the California Law and Ethics Exam
- Step 4: Complete Required Clinical Experience and Supervision
- Step 5: Complete Required Post-master's Coursework
- Step 6: Sit for the ASWB Clinical Level Exam
- Step 7: Submit the LCSW Application Packet
- Step 8: Work under a Qualified Professional until Licensed

### **Step 1: Register as an Associate Social Worker (ASW)**

Those with a MSW from outside of the U.S. must contact the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to determine if their degree meets the U.S. requirements. [www.cswe.org](http://www.cswe.org).

Required California Law and Ethics Coursework

Applicants with a MSW degree 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. 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 ASW Application

Associate social worker (ASW) is a California designation used for MSWs who are registered with the BBS, have met the initial requirements, and have received approval to perform clinical social work under a licensed mental health professional.

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 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#lcsw](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml#lcsw)

## **Step 2: Find an Appropriate Work Setting and a Qualified Supervisor**

### Work Setting Requirements

Registrants must be paid as employees and cannot be paid as independent consultants or contractors (utilizing the IRS 1099 tax form) until they hold a California LCSW license.

The following is from BBS *Statutes and Regulations*, Chapter 14, §4996.23. Supervised Post-Master's Experience Criteria Effective January 1, 2002:

- (e) *Experience shall only be gained in a setting that meets both of the following:*
  - (1) *Lawfully and regularly provides clinical social work, mental health counseling, or psychotherapy.*
  - (2) *Provides oversight to ensure that the associate's work at the setting meets the experience and supervision requirements set forth in this chapter and is within the scope of practice for the profession as defined in Section 4996.9.*
- (f) *Experience shall not be gained until the applicant has been registered as an associate clinical social worker.*
- (g) *Employment in a private practice as defined in subdivision (h) shall not commence until the applicant has been registered as an associate clinical social worker.*
- (h) *A private practice setting is a setting that is owned by a licensed clinical social worker, a licensed marriage and family therapist, a licensed psychologist, a licensed physician and surgeon, or a professional corporation of any of those licensed professions.*
- (i) *If volunteering, the associate shall provide the board with a letter from his or her employer verifying his or her voluntary status upon application for licensure.*
- (j) *If employed, the associate shall provide the board with copies of his or her W-2 tax forms for each year of experience claimed upon application for licensure.*
- (k) *While an associate may be a paid employee or volunteer, employers are encouraged to provide fair remuneration to associates.*
- (l) *An associate shall not do the following:*
  - (1) *Receive any remuneration from patients or clients and shall only be paid by his or her employer.*
  - (2) *Have any proprietary interest in the employer's business.*
  - (3) *Lease or rent space, pay for furnishings, equipment, or supplies, or in any other way pay for the obligations of his or her employer.*
- (m) *An associate, whether employed or volunteering, may obtain supervision from a person not employed by the associate's employer if that person has signed a written agreement with the employer to take supervisory responsibility for the associate's social work services.*

(n) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, associates and applicants for examination shall receive a minimum of one hour of supervision per week for each setting in which he or she is working.

#### Find a Qualified Supervisor

It is best to look for a clinical work setting where the employer provides a qualified supervisor and the registrant can obtain the required 3200 clinical hours within 2-4 years. If a supervisor is not provided by the employer, it is the responsibility of the ASW to find an "outside" supervisor, which often means paying for supervision. For registrants who obtain outside supervision, the BBS requires that the supervisor sign a written agreement assuming legal responsibility for the registrant's work. The outside supervision *cannot* serve in the role as a consultant (consulting and supervising are two distinct roles) to the agency or organization.

- Supervisor Qualifications: [www.bbs.ca.gov/licenses/asw\\_supervision.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/licenses/asw_supervision.shtml)
- Clinical Supervision Training: <https://www.socialworkweb.com/#/s/caclinicalsupervision>
- Sample Letter: [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcs\\_sample\\_letter\\_agreement.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcs_sample_letter_agreement.pdf)

#### Clinical Supervision Resources and Required Forms

- Supervisor Resources: [http://www.bbs.ca.gov/licenses/asw\\_supervision.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/licenses/asw_supervision.shtml)
- A Guide to Supervision: [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/asw\\_supervision\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/asw_supervision_brochure.pdf)
- ASW Supervision Information: [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/asw\\_supervisor\\_info.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/asw_supervisor_info.pdf)
- LCSW Supervisory Responsibility Statement: [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcrespon.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcrespon.pdf)
- Supervisory Plan: [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/supplan.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/supplan.pdf)

### **Step 3: Sit for the California Law and Ethics Exam**

#### California LCSW Exam Structure

LCSW candidates must pass the California Law and Ethics Exam, complete the required clinical experience, and obtain the post-master's required coursework *before* they can apply to sit for the ASWB Clinical Level Exam. After passing the ASWB Clinical Level Exam, registrants submit the LCSW application packet.

- BBS Video: A Registrant's Guide to the BBS Examination Restructure <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hf4I7ZzedA8&feature=youtu.be>
- 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

Before their first ASW renewal, registrants must sit for the California Law and Ethics Exam. Registrants first apply to the BBS to be deemed eligible to sit for the exam. Once approved by the BBS, candidates schedule an exam date through PSI who administers the Law and Ethics Exam. Candidates must take this 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 Law and Ethics Exam

Registrants, who fail the Law and Ethics exam, may re-apply to retake the exam after the required waiting period of 90 days and completing 12 hours of California law and ethics coursework through a BBS-recognized provider.

§4992.09. (c) *If an applicant fails the California law and ethics examination, he or she may retake the examination, upon payment of the required fees, without further application except for as provided in subdivision (d).* (d) *If a registrant fails to obtain a passing score on the California law and ethics examination described in subdivision (a) within his or her first renewal period on or after the operative date of this section, he or she shall complete, at a minimum, a 12-hour course in California law and ethics in order to be eligible to participate in the California law and ethics examination. Registrants shall only take the 12-hour California law and ethics course once during a renewal period. The 12-hour law and ethics course required by the section shall be taken through a board-approved continuing education provider, a county, state or governmental entity, or a college or university.* (e) *The board shall not issue a subsequent registration number unless the registrant has passed the California law and ethics examination.*

## Step 4: Complete Required Experience and Supervision

The licensing statutes and regulations are specific to the date the applicant is provided an ASW registration. The following information is from §4996.23. Supervised Post-Master's Experience Criteria Effective January 1, 2002.

*The experience required by subdivision (c) of Section 4996.2 shall meet the following criteria:*

*(a) All persons registered with the board on and after January 1, 2002, shall have at least 3,200 hours of post-master's degree supervised experience providing clinical social work services as permitted by Section 4996.9. At least 1,700 hours shall be gained under the supervision of a licensed clinical social worker. The remaining required supervised experience may be gained under the supervision of a licensed mental health professional acceptable to the board as defined by a regulation adopted by the board. This experience shall consist of the following:*

*(1) A minimum of 2,000 hours in clinical psychosocial diagnosis, assessment, and treatment, including psychotherapy or counseling. (2) A maximum of 1,200 hours in client-centered advocacy, consultation, evaluation, and research. (3) Of the 2,000 clinical hours required in paragraph (1), no less than 750 hours shall be face-to-face individual or group psychotherapy provided to clients in the context of clinical social work services. (4) A minimum of two years of supervised experience is required to be obtained over a period of not less than 104 weeks and shall have been gained within the six years immediately preceding the date on which the application for licensure was filed. (5) Experience shall not be credited for more than 40 hours in any week.*

*(b) "Supervision" means responsibility for, and control of, the quality of clinical social work services being provided. Consultation or peer discussion shall not be considered to be supervision.*

*(c) (1) Prior to the commencement of supervision, a supervisor shall comply with all requirements enumerated in Section 1870 of Title 16 of the California Code of Regulations and shall sign under penalty of perjury the "Responsibility Statement for Supervisors of an Associate Clinical Social Worker" form.*

*(2) Supervised experience shall include at least one hour of direct supervisor contact for a minimum of 104 weeks. For purposes of this subdivision, "one hour of direct supervisor contact" means one hour per week of face-to-face contact on an individual basis or two hours of face-to-face contact in a group conducted within the same week as the hours claimed.*

*(3) An associate shall receive at least one additional hour of direct supervisor contact for every week in which more than 10 hours of face-to-face psychotherapy is performed in each setting in*

*which experience is gained. No more than five hours of supervision, whether individual or group, shall be credited during any single week.*

*(4) Group supervision shall be provided in a group of not more than eight supervisees and shall be provided in segments lasting no less than one continuous hour.*

*(5) Of the 104 weeks of required supervision, 52 weeks shall be individual supervision, and of the 52 weeks of required individual supervision, not less than 13 weeks shall be supervised by a licensed clinical social worker.*

*(6) Notwithstanding paragraph (2), an associate clinical social worker working for a governmental entity, school, college, or university, or an institution that is both a nonprofit and charitable institution, may obtain the required weekly direct supervisor contact via live two-way videoconferencing. The supervisor shall be responsible for ensuring that client confidentiality is preserved.*

*(d) The supervisor and the associate shall develop a supervisory plan that describes the goals and objectives of supervision. These goals shall include the ongoing assessment of strengths and limitations and the assurance of practice in accordance with the laws and regulations. The associate shall submit to the board the initial original supervisory plan upon application for licensure.*

### **Step 5: Complete Required Post-Masters Coursework**

The BBS allows applicants to obtain all of the required post-masters coursework through online or in-person courses, as long as the training is offered through a BBS-recognized CE provider. The required coursework can also be met if the course appears on an official transcript, or the registrant 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.

Child Abuse Assessment and Reporting (7 hours)

Human Sexuality (10 hours)

Substance Abuse and Dependency (15 hours)

Spousal Abuse Assessment and Reporting (15 hours for those who entered degree program after 1/1/2004; Course can be any length for those who entered a degree program from 1/1/1995 to 12/31/2003)

Aging and Long Term Care (10 Hours only for those who entered a degree program on or after 1/1/2004)

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

### **Step 6: Sit for the ASWB Clinical Level Exam**

After passing the California Law and Ethics Exam and obtaining the required clinical hours and post-master's coursework, applicants can apply to take the ASWB Clinical Level Exam. Exam candidates apply to the BBS to be approved, and once approved; registrants contact ASWB directly to schedule an exam date. Registrants must take the exam at least once per year until receiving a passing score.

- 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)

## **Step 7: Submit the LCSW Application Packet**

After passing the ASWB Clinical Level Exam, registrants can submit the LCSW application packet. When the application is complete, it is recommended that candidates 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 it. Download the LCSW application from the BBS website at <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml#asw-lcsw>.

## **Step 8: 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* they receive their LCSW license. 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. If there is a lawsuit, the ASW, supervisor, and the agency 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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