

Frequently Asked Questions (Updated April 21, 2009)

Regarding Draft Changes To WAC 246-810 For Certified Counselor, Certified Adviser, and Agency Affiliated Counselor

Note: The purpose of this document is to provide general information regarding the draft rules. This document is not and will not be part of the official rules or statutes regulating the professions. As the proposed rules may change before final adoption, information provided in this document may become outdated and/or may become inaccurate. You are therefore strongly encouraged to obtain and review the final rules when they are adopted.

Background

Legislation passed in 2008 will result in significant changes to the registered counselor credential in 2009 and 2010:

Timelines:

- Beginning July 1, 2009, no new registered counselor credentials will be issued. If your \$130.00 application and registration fee is postmarked July 1, 2009 or before it will still be processed.
- Existing registered counselor credentials can be renewed or reactivated, and will be valid through June 30, 2010. As of July 1, 2010 this credential will be abolished.
- Therefore, individuals with a registered counselor credential will need to obtain a different credential by July 1, 2010, if they intend to continue practicing after that date.

New Credentials:

Eight new credentials will be created on July 1, 2009:

- Agency Affiliated Counselor Registration – a new registration for individuals who work in counseling for the state of Washington, or who work for agencies or facilities that are licensed or certified by the state of Washington.
- Certified Counselor License and Certified Adviser License – new licenses for individuals who perform private practice counseling.
- Chemical Dependency Professional Trainee Certification – a new certification for individuals who are in training to become a Chemical Dependency Professional.
- Mental Health Counselor Associate License – a new license for individuals who are gaining the supervised experience to become a licensed Mental Health Counselor.
- Marriage and Family Therapist Associate License – a new license for individuals who are gaining the supervised experience to become a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist.
- Social Work Associate Advanced License and Social Work Associate Independent Clinical – new licenses for individuals who are gaining the supervised experience to become a licensed Social Worker.

Questions and Answers Regarding Timelines:

Question: I would like to begin a new counseling practice in July, 2009. Can I become a registered counselor at that time?

Answer: You will not be able to obtain a new registered counselor credential after July 1, 2009 (this year). You may obtain a new registered counselor credential before July 1, 2009, and practice under that registered counselor credential until the date that all registered counselor credentials are abolished - on July 1, 2010 (next year). If you expect to begin counseling after June 30 of this year, and have never had a registered counselor credential, you will need to apply for and obtain a credential other than registered counselor before you can begin counseling.

Question: I am currently a registered counselor. Will I automatically be grandfathered into one of the new credentials?

Answer: No. Everyone will have to apply for a new credential (certified counselor, certified adviser, or agency affiliated counselor). There will be no grandfathering. Everyone will have to meet the minimum requirements in rule and pay the application/examination fee.

Question: I am currently a registered counselor. Can I renew and practice under this credential until July 1, 2010?

Answer: Yes.

Question: I had a credential as a registered counselor, but let it expire. Can I reactivate the credential?

Answer: Yes, you can reactive the expired credential, but it will only be renewed through June 30, 2010, because all registered counselor credentials will be abolished on July 1, 2010.

Question: When can I apply for one of the new eight credentials?

Answer: Applications can be submitted beginning July 1, 2009.

Question: I'm planning on applying for one of the new credentials. How quickly will I receive it?

Answer: Processing time will vary greatly depending on the type of credential you are applying for. Credential types which do not require verification of education or experience, or an examination, such as Agency Affiliated Counselor and Chemical Dependency Professional Trainee can be processed with fewer steps and will require less time to issue the credential. Other credential types which require verification and review of documentation such as education, training, and experience may require much time to complete before the credentials can be issued. Applications are processed in the date order that they are received.

Questions and Answers Regarding the Rule Definition Section

Question: Why do the draft rules still refer to registered counselor?

Answer: Because the registered counselor credential will remain valid and will not be abolished until July 1, 2010, existing rules and regulations will remain in effect for registered counselors until that date.

Question: I noticed that there is a definition of counseling that has been added in the draft rules. Where did this come from?

Answer: This definition of counseling has been in the counselor statute (RCW 18.19) for many years. It had not been included in the rules until now, and is being added to improve and add clarity to the rules.

Questions and Answers Regarding the Exemption Rule Section

Question: Is it correct that certain practices and settings are exempted from requiring a credential to practice counseling.

Answer: Yes, the legislature identified these exemptions in statute. See RCW 18.19.040 or WAC 246-810-011 "Exempt activities and individuals" in the draft rules.

Question: Are these exemptions new?

Answer: Only one of the eight areas of exemption is new - 246-810-011(7) – peer counselors. The other exemptions have been in statute for many years.

Questions and Answers Regarding the State Employee Rule Section

Question: I'm a state employee where I provide counseling services. Do I have to have a credential?

Answer: Yes, if you meet the definition of counseling and you work in one of the agency/facilities listed in WAC 246-810-016 or 017.

Question: Is this a new requirement?

Answer: No, it has been part of the counseling statute for many years. What is new is that instead of obtaining a registered counselor credential, state employees will obtain a registration for agency affiliated counselor. (State employees providing hypnotherapy services will continue to obtain the hypnotherapist registration.)

Questions and Answers Regarding the Agency Affiliated Counselor Rules Section

Question: What is the definition of an agency affiliated counselor?

Answer: "Agency affiliated counselor" means a person registered under chapter 18.19 RCW, who is engaged in counseling and employed by an agency.

Question: What is the definition of an agency?

Answer: Agency means: an agency or facility operated, licensed or certified by the state of Washington.

Question: I work for an agency that has a business license in the state of Washington. Will my employer's business license by itself qualify me to register as an agency affiliated counselor?

Answer: No, your employer's business license by itself does not meet the standard to employ agency affiliated counselors. Your employer should review the rule on becoming recognized to employ agency affiliated counselors.

Question: I am a state employee and provide counseling services as part of my job. When I apply for agency affiliated counselor, will I need to document my degree and take a test?

Answer: No. Agency affiliated counselor is a new registration, and does not require documentation of a degree or an examination. However, as with all credentials, applicants for agency affiliated counselor will have to show proof of having completed a course on AIDs/HIV, and pass a criminal background check. In addition, in the future, continuing education requirements may be established in order to renew your agency affiliated counselor registration. (See continuing education questions and answers.)

Question: I'm a registered counselor but I don't work for a state agency, nor for an agency or facility operated, licensed, or certified by the state. Can I register as an agency affiliated counselor?

Answer: No, you do not qualify for an agency affiliated counselor registration. In order to continue counseling, you will need to apply for and obtain a credential other than agency affiliated counselor by June 30, 2010.

Question: I'm not a state employee, but I work for a facility that is licensed by the state. I don't see my facility listed in the rules as being recognized. Can my facility request to be recognized, so that I can be register as an agency affiliated counselor?

Answer: Your facility can request to be recognized, but a review will have to be conducted to confirm that the facility is licensed or certified. A process for such reviews is being developed. See WAC 246-810-017.

Questions and Answers Regarding the Certified Counselor and Adviser Rules Section

Question: I will have just a month less than five years as a registered counselor by June 30, 2010. When I apply for certified counselor, will I have to show that I have a bachelor's degree in a counseling-related field? Also, will I be required to have a supervision arrangement instead of consultation arrangement?

Answer: Yes to both. Since you will have been a registered counselor for less than five years at the time the registered counselor credential is abolished, you will have to show proof of the degree, and you will be required to have supervision instead of consultation.

Question: Does the 5 years need to be consecutive or total if I have let it expire?

Answer: The 5 years does not have to be consecutive but must total 5 years and your registered counselor credential must be active at the time of application it cannot be expired.

Question: My degree is in a counseling-related field, but it isn't one that is listed in the rules. Can I request that my degree be recognized?

Answer: Yes. A review process to consider the recognition of degrees in additional areas is being developed. See WAC 246-810-024.

Question: Will I able to obtain a reading list so that I can study for the examination?

Answer: Yes. The examination and study guide are still being developed and are not yet available. As information becomes available it will be posted on the website.

Question: A friend and I are both applying for certified counselor. Can we act as supervisor or consultants to each other to satisfy that requirement?

Answer: No. The draft rules prohibit such dual role relationships. See WAC 246-810-026.

Question: Do I have to apply to the state in order to serve as a supervisor or consultant?

Answer: No, applying to the department is not required in order to serve as a supervisor or consultant. However, supervisors, consultants, and the credential holders they supervise or provide consultation to must meet all of the requirements established in the rules, and may be asked to provide evidence to the department that they meet the requirements should there be a question. See WAC 246-810-026.

Question: Will there be more detailed standards on supervision and consultation?

Answer: It is anticipated that additional rules will be developed on these standards after the year of transition. An advisory committee will be appointed, and will be available to assist in the further development and improvement of the standards. See WAC 246-810-025.

Questions and Answers Regarding Continuing Education Rules Section

Question: What are the continuing education requirements for agency affiliated counselors?

Answer: The establishment of continuing education requirements for Agency Affiliated Counselors is permitted under the statute enacted by the Legislature. However, the legislation requires that the Secretary of Health consult with all state agencies that utilize Agency Affiliated Counselors before adopting these requirements. Since all state agencies that will utilize Agency Affiliated Counselors will not be known until these credentials begin to be issued later this year, the establishment of Agency Affiliated Counselor continuing education requirements will not occur at this time.

General Questions and Answers

Question: Have the fees for the new credentials been determined?

Answer: Yes, the proposed fees for the new credentials can be found in WAC 246-810-990.

Question: When will the applications be available?

Answer: We will start accepting applications on July 1, 2009. The applications will be posted online as soon as they are available.