Certified Wellness Practitioner (CWP) Examination Handbook

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Introduction and Background

History of the CWP Certification Program

This handbook is designed to provide information about the processes for the Certified Wellness Practitioner (CWP) certification program, and specifically for the CWP Certification Examination. CWP candidates include wellness professionals who are interested in obtaining the CWP credential to showcase their competencies and skills in wellness promotion.

The CWP certification program was developed in 2014 to help establish professional standards in wellness and to recognize wellness professionals who have strong academic preparation, professional experience, and a commitment to ongoing professional development.

When the Council on Wellness Certification Excellence (CWCE) released the original Wellness Promotion Competency Model, based on research published in 2017, the model became the new standard for the CWP designation, and the CWCE revised the CWP application and eligibility requirements to reflect these competencies.

In April 2020, Butler University faculty and a team of wellness promotion researchers conducted an additional study clarifying and supporting the validity of the five-domain competency model [Peterson, C., Ellery, J., Laube, T., Yuhas, B., & Hunt, S, (2022), *International Journal of Community Well-being*). A revised Wellness Promotion Competency Model, comprised of 27 total competencies within five domains, was published in 2021.]

In alignment with this competency model, a new certification examination and associated eligibility requirements were launched in 2022 for the CWP designation. The new processes aimed to increase access and learning opportunities for professionals with a variety of backgrounds and skills while providing a valid, reliable, and consistent certification experience.

The CWP examination allows professionals to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities in the five domains of the Wellness Promotion Competency Model: Authenticity & Self-awareness, Whole-Person & Systems Approaches, Inclusive & Responsive Practices, Communication & Connection, and Legal & Ethical Principles (2021). The CWP beta certification exam was offered in January and March 2022, and the CWP examination was first offered in its finalized form in September 2022.

About the Council on Wellness Certification Excellence (CWCE)

The CWCE is an autonomous, expert-led council that reviews and maintains all CWP certification standards and policies, including overseeing exam eligibility and continuing education requirements, to ensure the CWP credential remains valid and reliable.

Definition of Certification

The Wellness Alliance applies the following definition to "certification," derived from the National Commission for Certifying Agencies' *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*: "Certification is a voluntary process that grants a time-limited credential to individuals meeting predetermined standards for knowledge, skills, or competencies. The assessment of the individual applicant is independent of a specific class, course, or other education/training program. Certification holders must complete continuing education requirements to retain the credential."

Value of Wellness Certification

Certification programs based on competencies are meaningful to employees and employers. Not only can credentials awarded help professionals stand out and claim recognition in their career, but according to the 2019 "Value of Certification" report by the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (I.C.E.), certification can also help prepare employees for tasks and demands within their field of work. Self-reports from employees in I.C.E.'s study also show that certification can help with achieving career-related goals and advancing careers more quickly compared to individuals that aren't certified. A professional certification program supported by a competency model can provide a collective understanding of employees' knowledge, skills, and abilities. The CWP designation is one indication of professional competency and commitment to continued scholarship and professional development.

Certified Wellness Practitioners:

- Receive recognition for their professional competence in the five domains of the Wellness Promotion Competency Model.
- Elevate their reputations among their employers, colleagues, and clients.
- Build enhanced connections and community with interdisciplinary teams of professionals.
- Share a mutual understanding of wellness and wellness-approaches.
- Attain leadership opportunities that help shape the trajectory of the wellness field.
- Create wellness-enhancing environments through the initiation of individual, organizational, and cultural change.

Development of the CWP Certification Examination

The CWP Certification Examination Blueprint and associated content were developed based on the Wellness Promotion Competency Model released in 2021. The CWCE provided guidance on revised CWP eligibility requirements and the certification examination blueprint. A psychometrician was engaged to ensure the certification examination was developed appropriately to be valid and reliable and to mitigate item bias. For the CWP beta exam and certification exam, approximately 25 subject matter experts (SMEs) participated in item writing, examination review, and standard-setting activities. The CWP certification examination consists of 150 multiple-choice questions covering the competency areas noted in the CWP Certification Examination Blueprint.

CWP Certification Examination Blueprint

Content Areas	Number of Scored Items
Domain 1: Authenticity & Self-awareness (20%) Competencies: • Engage in ongoing reflection to expand personal growth and professional development in multiple dimensions of wellness • Demonstrate commitment to wellness promotion by modeling healthy lifestyle practices in multiple dimensions of wellness • Establish authentic and autonomy-supportive relationships • Recognize your own limitations in wellness promotion and refer individuals to other professionals when appropriate to support their wellness goals	**30**
Domain 2: Whole-Person & Systems Approaches (30%) Competencies: • Use an ecological approach (e.g., interactions among the individual, family, organization, community, and social systems) to understand the ways dynamic systems impact an individual's experience of wellness • Assess individual and/or group characteristics, interests, and needs using a multi-dimensional and ecological approach • Identify health and wellness resources and materials that allow for an individual's self-discovery, self-knowledge, and self-direction • Apply relevant theories and models to explain the integrated role of physical, social, intellectual, emotional, occupational, and spiritual aspects in the human pursuit and experience of wellness throughout the lifespan • Adopt person-centered communication practices that consider the whole person, recognizing the influence factors such as socio-demographic variables and worldview have on the communication process • Provide developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant evidence-based information to educate individuals and the public about wellness • Use participatory, humanistic, and strengths-based processes to design opportunities that will lead toward achieving established objectives and outcomes • Use appropriate techniques (e.g., strengths-based, humanistic, cognitive-behavioral) to encourage individuals to be active participants in their personal wellness journey	**45**

Content Areas	Number of Scored Items
Domain 3: Inclusive & Responsive Practices (20%) Competencies: • Practice self-awareness and self-regulation to minimize the effects of personal bias in working with diverse individuals and groups • Practice multicultural competence, recognizing the dynamics of oppression and privilege on an individual's lived experiences • Demonstrate compassion, integrity, and respect for diverse individuals and groups, including but not limited to diversity in sex, age, culture, race, ethnicity, disabilities, body size, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and gender identity • Work to uncover individual's strengths, concerns, and values using a person-centered approach to inquiry that includes active listening to help set appropriate wellness goals and strategies • Assist individuals in identifying barriers or resistance to change that are interrupting their ability to integrate wellness-promoting behaviors into their lives • Adapt wellness strategies to fit individual, geographical and cultural needs, acknowledging that there are no universally correct models or processes	30
Domain 4: Communication & Connection (20%) Competencies: • Recognize the influence of organizational development, leadership, and culture on individual wellness • Articulate to key stakeholders the value of wellness for individuals and how it supports the organization's or community's mission, purpose, and strategic goals • Establish collaborative relationships and interdisciplinary teams to promote sustainable wellness practices that meet long-term individual, organizational, and/or community goals • Use meaningful and inclusive communication methods and technologies to support, manage, and promote wellness initiatives • Use quantitative and qualitative feedback to continually evaluate the quality and effectiveness of initiatives • Use quantitative and qualitative data to communicate key findings to stakeholders	**30**
Domain 5: Legal & Ethical Principles (10%) Competencies: • Comply with legal standards for confidentiality, compliance, and mandated reporting • Work within your scope of practice and in accordance with your profession-specific code of conduct • Maintain ethical relationships	**15**

Applying for the CWP Certification Exam

CWP Certification Examination Eligibility

The CWCE recommended revised eligibility requirements in 2021. The eligibility criteria outline a combination of education and work experience needed to gain sufficient competence across the five domains of the certification examination blueprint, defined and validated through the evidence-informed and published Wellness Promotion Competency Model.

The requirements were determined based on:

- the introduction of the requirement to pass a competency-based certification exam to earn CWP designation;
- the recognition of the required competence of a wellness practitioner; and
- the consideration of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of qualified candidates.

CWP candidates must meet the criteria within ONE of the following pathways by the start of the exam period to qualify to sit for CWP Certification Examination.

Certified Wellness Practitioner (CWP) Exam Eligibility Pathways

PATHWAY #1

Wellness or Wellness-Related Bachelor's Degree or Higher **OR** Wellness Associate Degree

OPTION A

Formal Education
- Bachelor's degree or higher
- Wellness* or wellness-related**

Professional Experience
One year in wellness or proof of a qualified internship/practicum^

OPTION B

Formal Education
- Associate degree
- Wellness*

Professional Experience
Two years in wellness or one year in wellness and proof of a qualified internship/practicum^

PATHWAY #2

Non-Wellness Bachelor's Degree or Higher **OR** Wellness-Related Associate Degree

OPTION A

Formal Education
- Bachelor's degree or higher
- Non-wellness

Professional Experience
Three years in wellness, or two years in wellness WITH either a minor in wellness or a graduate certificate in wellness

OPTION B

Formal Education
- Associate degree
- Wellness-Related**

Professional Experience
Three years in wellness, or two years in wellness WITH either a minor in wellness or a graduate certificate in wellness

PATHWAY #3

Non-Wellness-Related Associate Degree **OR** High School Diploma, GED, or Equivalent Degree/Diploma

ONLY OPTION

Formal Education
- Associate degree
- Non-wellness

OR
- High school diploma or equivalent

Professional Experience
Five years in wellness

Note: Demonstrating 15 hours of wellness continuing education in the last five years (must align with the Wellness Promotion Competency Model) may replace up to one year of required professional experience.

Eligibility Review Required!
Please note that all candidates applying to sit for the CWP exam via Pathway #3 must submit an Eligibility Verification Form and pay the associated review fee.

***Wellness Degrees:** Wellness, Health Promotion, Health Education, Public Health, Integrative Health, Healthy Living, Wellness Management
****Wellness-Related Degrees:** Dietetics, Kinesiology, Exercise Science, Psychology, Social Work, Nursing, Health Psychology, Advanced Degree (D.O., M.D., P.A., D.C., D.P.T.)
^**Internship/Practicum:** If non-credit-bearing, candidates must submit documentation verifying a minimum of 70 internship and/or practicum hours.

IMPORTANT ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION INFORMATION

All CWP candidates must complete an application during registration to provide information supporting their eligibility. Candidates in Pathway #1 or Pathway #2 who are unsure if they meet the eligibility requirements to sit for the CWP exam have the OPTION to request a prescreening by submitting the Eligibility Verification Form. Prescreening is required for candidates in Pathway #3. If requesting verification, candidates must submit their Eligibility Verification Form no later than the 15th of the month prior to the exam period (i.e., before December 15, April 15, or August 15) to guarantee notification of eligibility prior to the examination registration deadline. Effective Date: December 17, 2021

Note: Certification guidelines prevent Wellness Alliance staff from reviewing eligibility documents, making eligibility recommendations, or providing any eligibility approvals. Candidates in Pathway #3 (non-wellness-related Associate degree or high school diploma/, GED/equivalent diploma) are required to submit the Eligibility Verification Review Form and go through the pre-screening process. Those in Pathways #1 and #2 have the OPTION of pre-screening but it is not required.

Certification Examination Timeline

Certification exams are administered three times per year, starting on the second Tuesday in January, May, and September. Online registration for CWP exams opens at least three months prior to each exam and closes the Thursday before the exam period begins. Applicants have one attempt to complete their certification examination within four hours (and in one sitting) at any time during the two-week exam period for which they are registered.

How to Register for the CWP Certification Exam

Individuals interested in sitting for the certification exam and who have determined they meet the eligibility requirements, must register for the exam online (wellnessalliance.org/cwp) and pay all associated fees by the stated registration deadline.

Candidates will be required during registration to verify that all eligibility and identifying information provided is accurate. If a candidate has forged or falsified information during registration or at any point during the examination/certification process, sanctions may result, including invalidation of certification exam score or revocation of certification or eligibility for certification. Candidates may be contacted for additional information if the registration form is missing the required components.

A random selection of applicants may also be audited, prior to or after, the certification exam and asked to submit documentation to support their eligibility. If it is deemed that the candidate is ineligible, and additional documentation is not provided within 15 days of notification via email, the candidate will not be able to sit for the exam or their certification will be revoked.

If candidates do not currently have an active Wellness Alliance login, they will be prompted to create an account before registering for the CWP Certification Examination. Paid membership is NOT required to register for or take the exam, or to maintain CWP certification.

Examination Accommodation

A candidate may request accommodations to take the certification examination. Accommodations are typically requested for things such as medical issues, learning or other disabilities, or possible language barriers. Requests for examination accommodations must be submitted within 15 days of the exam period opening. All requests must be included on the application form or emailed to certification@wellnesssalliance.org a include verification of accommodations requests, reasoning, and a statement of assistance needed. All requests for examination accommodation are confidential, and documentation submitted in support of the request is used solely for the purpose of evaluating the request. All requests are evaluated on a case-by-case basis and are subject to approval.

Non-Discrimination Statement

The Wellness Alliance and CWCE shall provide equal access to and opportunity in its programs, operations, certification/recertification, facilities, selection of volunteers and vendors and provision of services, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Certification Exam Fee and Wellness Alliance Membership

Refer to the current CWP Rate Chart for all CWP-related fees. All exam fees include a $50 non-refundable application fee. Wellness Alliance membership is not required to register for the CWP exam nor to maintain certification; however, membership includes exclusive discounts on CWP exam fees, optional study materials, and recertification fees.

Cancellation Requests and Technical Support

If unable to complete the certification examination during their scheduled examination period, the candidate may request a transfer or refund by contacting support@wellnessalliance.org. Documentation supporting the reasoning for the request may be required. See the Wellness Alliance Policies for transfer and cancellation details and fees.

If a technical issue occurs while taking the exam, candidates should immediately contact support@wellnessalliance.org with detailed information about the issue that occurred.

Taking the Certification Examination

Preparing for the CWP Certification Examination

The CWP certification examination is offered online only through the Wellness Alliance Learning Center. Registered candidates whose payment has been processed will receive an email with exam access instructions at least three (3) days prior to the start of the exam period.

To prepare for the certification examination, candidates are encouraged to review and study the Wellness Promotion Competency Model, refer to the CWP Certification Examination Blueprint included in this handbook, and seek out trainings and resources that support the competencies.

While not exhaustive, free resources are available on wellnessalliance.org to help candidates identify the content featured on the exam, including a CWP Exam Handbook, CWP Exam Prep Resources, and Sample Exam Questions. Optional paid resources include a Practice Exam & Study Resources Guide and nine Wellness Promotion Competency Model Courses offered by the Wellness Alliance. Utilizing prep materials or completing specific courses does not guarantee eligibility to sit for the CWP exam nor does it predict performance on the certification exam.

What to Expect for the Online Certification Examination

- The exam is administered online via the Wellness Alliance Learning Center only. An active Wellness Alliance Member or Nonmember login is required for access.
- The certification exam is offered in English only.
- The exam consists of 150 multiple-choice questions as outlined in the Exam Blueprint.
- The exam must be completed by the candidate with no assistance from other individuals or other external sources, such as internet searches.
- Testing attempts are limited to one certification examination attempt per examination period.
- The exam must be completed in one sitting anytime during the two-week exam period and submitted on or before the final day of the exam period by 11:59 p.m. CT.
- Once a candidate begins their exam, they have four (4) hours to answer all exam questions and submit the exam. Upon submission, they will receive an immediate (unofficial) pass/fail status.

Examination Security

At the start of the exam, the candidate will be required to confirm their understanding of this statement:

CWP Candidate Statement of Understanding

Conduct occurring before, during, or after testing for the CWP certification exam that violates the ethics outlined in the Candidate Statement of Understanding may result in invalidation of examination results and/or other penalties and be reported to the Council on Wellness Certification Excellence (CWCE).

1. The CWP exam is highly confidential. The examination questions are property of the Wellness Alliance. Unauthorized disclosure of any exam content or questions is prohibited under copyright laws. By acknowledging this statement of understanding, you agree to maintain the confidentiality of the CWP certification examination content and items. You must therefore:
    - Keep the examination content confidential, even after completing the examination. This also includes not discussing the content with anyone who has been administered the examination before you, with you, or who has not taken the certification examination yet.
    - Not use or be in possession of any electronic device other than the device being used to take the exam (such as cell phones, cameras, iPads, etc.) while taking the certification examination.
    - Not record, memorize, or attempt to recreate examination items, whether for financial gain or not.
2. You attest that you neither received nor gave any outside assistance in the completion of this exam.
3. Any cheating (including, but not limited to, using internet searches and/or other external resources while taking the exam) and/or breach of confidentiality/security or any attempt to subvert the examination process by any candidate violates the purpose and principles of the examination. Any candidate who carries out, takes part in, or witnesses such behavior must report it to the CWCE as soon as possible.
4. The Wellness Alliance and CWCE strive to report results that accurately reflect the competence and professional skill and performance of each candidate and represent a valid measure of this as sampled by the examination. In order to ensure the examination promotes these ideals, the CWCE reserves the right to cancel or withhold any examination results when, in the sole opinion of the Wellness Alliance or CWCE, a testing irregularity occurs; cheating has occurred; there is an apparent discrepancy in, or falsification of, a candidate's identification; a candidate engages in misconduct or plagiarism; when aberrancies in performance are detected for which there is no reasonable and satisfactory explanation; or the results are believed to be invalid for any other reason.

As the CWP candidate, you agree to abide by all regulations, as well as written instructions controlling the conduct of the examination. These regulations are intended to preserve the integrity of the examination process by providing standard test administration conditions that yield valid and reliable results.

After the CWP Certification Examination

Certification Examination Results

A score report that supports professional development will be emailed to the candidate within one week of the exam period ending. For confidentiality purposes, scores are released to the candidate only. Official certification status will be emailed on the first business day of the month following the exam period

Retesting

Testing attempts are limited to one certification examination attempt per testing period. Candidates who do not receive a passing score will be emailed details for retaking the certification exam at a reduced rate.

Appeals

All candidates have the right to file an appeal of an adverse decision resulting in a denial of certification or recertification based on a failure to satisfy application or eligibility requirements, payment of required fees, or failure of the certification examination caused by conditions beyond the candidate's control. Appeals should be submitted in writing via email to certification@wellnessalliance.org within 15 calendar days of the determination notice. If no request for an appeal is made within 15 calendar days, the adverse decision shall be deemed final, effective immediately.

Appeals must include a statement from the candidate affected by the adverse decision containing their full statement of the facts relevant to the alleged violation and the specific basis for the appeal, as well as any verifiable supporting documentation that the individual wishes to be considered, including any available and relevant documentary evidence from pertinent regulatory or credentialing proceedings.

Appeals of adverse decisions will be investigated by a panel consisting of three (3) members of the CWCE, who will make the final determination about an appeal. The certification candidate will be notified of the final decision within sixty (60) days of receipt of the written (emailed) appeal statement.

To protect the security and integrity of the CWP certification examination, examination questions and answers will not be released to any individual or organization. Every effort is taken to ensure the accuracy of the examination. If a candidate believes there is an error in an examination question, the concern should be emailed to the CWCE at certification@wellnessalliance.org.

Credentials

The CWP credentials may be used only after receiving official notification of certification.

Examples of correct usage:

- Joe Smith is a Certified Wellness Practitioner
- Joe Smith, CWP
- Two XYZ employees hold the CWP certification
- Joe Smith has earned his CWP credentials from the Wellness Alliance

If an individual does not recertify by the end of their certification cycle, or if their certification is revoked for any reason, they must immediately cease the use of the CWP credentials,

Certificate

Once certified, candidates may download their digital certificate from their Professional Development Journal when signed in to wellnessalliance.org. Candidates will receive additional details via email about ways to promote their new certification and requirements for maintaining their new credentials. The CWP certification cycle is for three years, and a new digital certificate will be made available in their Professional Development Journal upon each recertification approval.

Verifying Certification Status + Online CWP Directory

The Wellness Alliance reserves the right to make available to the public a certified individual's name, city, state, country, and certification status. Individuals who pass the CWP certification exam, earn their CWP credential, and maintain their recertification may also be listed in the online directory of Certified Wellness Practitioners. Individuals who do not wish to be listed in the public directory may submit an opt-out request to certification@wellnessalliance.org.

Maintaining CWP Certification

Recertification Requirements

CWPs are required to pursue continuing education (CE) that aligns with the Wellness Promotion Competency Model. By participating in continuing education activities, CWPs continue to advance their knowledge and skills, keeping them current, relevant, and at the forefront of a rapidly evolving and demanding field.

Every three years, in addition to paying a recertification fee, CWPs must earn and document a total of 30 CE credits to recertify.

- A minimum of CE 10 credits must be earned through Category 1 CE activities (CE activity pre-approved by CWCE or wellness-related academic coursework supported by transcripts)
- The remaining 20 CE credits may be earned through Category 1 or Category 2 CE activities (applicable CE activities not pre-approved by CWCE).

Note: CE credits can be earned through the Wellness Alliance or through other reputable organizations.

Further information regarding CE credits will be provided upon passing the CWP certification examination and becoming certified. See wellnessalliance.org for further details about CWP recertification.