



National Association of Social Workers ~ California Chapter

## Steps to a California LCSW for Out-of-State Licensed SWs—Prior to 2016

### Target Audience

This document is designed for licensed clinical social workers from out-of-state who are in good standing and interested in obtaining a California LCSW. This document pertains to applicants who will sit for the LCSW exams *PRIOR* to January 1, 2016.

### **BBS Announcement: LCSW Exam Restructure Scheduled January 1, 2016**

In September 2013, it was announced that the LCSW exam restructure will take place on January 1, 2016. On this date, the two current exams will be replaced with the following two exams: (1) California Law and Ethics Exam, and (2) ASWB Clinical Level Exam. To stay current on new BBS regulations and changes, subscribe to receive BBS e-mail alerts at <https://www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php>.

**\*\*There is a separate document pertaining to out-of-state licensed clinical social workers who will sit for the California LCSW exams *AFTER* January 1, 2016.**

### Considerations

There is no one document that can address all questions related to becoming licensed as a LCSW in California. The NASW-California Chapter updates this document regularly; however, it may not reflect all of the very latest legislative changes. The best practice is to stay current by subscribing to the BBS automated e-mail updates at [www.bbbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbbs.ca.gov) and regularly check the BBS website. The most common mistake made by applicants is failing to fully understand the requirements and process *prior to starting the licensing process*.

### Outline of Topics

Section 1: Social Work Employment and Licensure in California

Section 2: California Licensing Board (BBS)

Section 3: Steps to a California LCSW License

Section 4: Common Applicant Mistakes

Section 5: Case Example of Out-of-State Applicant

Section 6: Summary of Related Resources

## **Section 1: Social Work Employment and Licensure in California**

In California, individuals with MSW degrees can be employed as social workers without holding a 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.

### **Clinical Social Work and Psychotherapy Defined by California Law**

The following excerpt was copied from the Board of Behavioral Sciences' (BBS) *Statutes and Regulations*, Chapter 14 Clinical Social Work. To view or download this manual, visit [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf).

*§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 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**

It is important to understand that social work licensing requirements vary from state to state and that there is no direct reciprocity in any state. To view licensing requirements for each state, visit the Association of Social Work Boards' (ASWB) website and look for the *Social Work Laws & Regulations Online Comparison Guide* at [www.aswb.org/](http://www.aswb.org/).

## **Section 2 California Licensing Board (BBS)**

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

The function of the BBS is to protect the well-being of consumers by setting standards for mental health professionals through effective communication, education, examination, licensing, and enforcement. The board issues, and annually updates, the *Statutes and Regulations Related to LCSWs, LMFTs, LEPs, and LPCCs*. Chapter 14 is specific to clinical social work. This document is available at [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf).

### **BBS Contact Information**

California State Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS)

1625 N. Market Blvd., Suite S-200, Sacramento, CA 95834

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

Staff Directory: [www.bbs.ca.gov/staff\\_directory.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/staff_directory.shtml)

Recommendation: **Contact only the ASW and LCSW Analysts** (to ensure accuracy)

### **BBS Subscriber List**

The BBS uses this free automated e-mail service to notify applicants and licensees about updates and changes. Subscribe today at [www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php](http://www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php).

### **BBS as an Advocate**

It is more productive for registrants to view the board's primary functions as positive and necessary. Applicants must be proactive and take full responsibility for knowing, understanding, and meeting the requirements. The deadlines and timeframes are part of legal statute; consequently, there can be no exceptions regardless of the circumstances.

### **NASW Recommendations**

It is advisable for applicants to keep a log of communication with the board. For example, applicants should speak to or e-mail the LCSW Analyst, and write a note detailing the date, question, and answer provided. It is advisable for applicants to maintain a file for all licensing related information. Having one location for applications, certificates, etc. will help avoid some of the most common pitfalls.

**Important:** Once registered with the BBS, any changes to one's name or address must be reported in writing to the BBS within 30 days of the change. Visit the following website and look under "Miscellaneous" for forms to change personal data. For BBS Forms and Publications, visit [www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml).

### **Designation Clarification**

- Associate Clinical Social Worker (ASW or ACSW) is a designation specific to the California LCSW licensing process. Visit [www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/index.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/index.shtml).
- Academy of Certified Social Workers (ACSW) is a professional credential offered through the NASW national office. Visit: <http://socialworkers.org/credentials/default.asp>.

## **Section 3: Steps to a California LCSW License**

### **BBS Overview of LCSW Licensing Requirements**

The first, and very critical, step for anyone interested in a California LCSW license is to become familiar with the board's website and become familiar with the following information:

- LCSW Out of State Applicant Information  
[www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate\\_lcs.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate_lcs.shtml)
- Navigating the LCSW License Process  
[www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs\\_presentation.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs_presentation.shtml)

- LCSW Exam Eligibility Application: *Pages 7 & 8 are specific to qualified out-of-state LCSWs and provide a variety of scenarios that applicants find helpful.*  
[www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcsapp.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcsapp.pdf)
- *BBS Statutes and Regulations*, 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)

## **Steps to Becoming a California LCSW**

LCSW applicants must meet two fundamental requirements: (1) possess a master's degree from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited school of social work, and (2) *not* have committed any crimes or acts constituting grounds for denial of licensure under Section 480.

The reader will note that the basic steps for out-of-state LCSWs are nearly identical to the ten basic steps for MSW applicants. The only major difference is that licensed out-of-state applicants can use prior supervised experience to meet the California requirement.

The basic steps for obtaining a LCSW in California are outlined below:

Step 1: Register with the BBS as an ASW (See details)

Step 2: Document Out-of-State Experience

Step 3: Obtain Required Post-Master's Coursework

Step 4: Submit LCSW Application Packet

Step 5: Pass Standard Written Exam

Step 6: Pass Written Clinical Vignette Exam

Step 7: Work under Licensed Professional Until Licensed

### **Step 1: Register with the BBS as an ASW**

#### **Question: Do I need to register as an associate social worker (ASW)?**

The answer to this question is determined by whether the licensed out-of-state applicant will be performing psychotherapy while waiting to become licensed. The following paragraphs clarify when it is necessary to register as an ASW with the Board.

- To perform psychotherapy in California, social workers must hold a valid LCSW license *or* be registered with the Board as an associate clinical social worker (ASW).
- Licensed social workers from another state may find a job where they perform psychotherapy when supervised by a California licensed mental health professional. This includes a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), marriage and family therapist (MFT), licensed professional clinical counselor (LPCC), licensed psychologist, or psychiatrist. In this scenario, the California licensed mental health professional assumes legal responsibility for the services

provided by the out-of-state LCSW. Consequently, the out-of-state applicant will have to register with the board as an ASW *prior* to providing psychotherapy.

- Those holding a valid social work license from another state may choose to work in a setting where they do not perform psychotherapy. In this circumstance, the out-of-state LCSW does not have to register with the Board as an ASW.

For details, refer to the *BBS Statutes and Regulations*, Chapter 14, Sections 4996.14 through 4996.17 at [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf).

## **Step 2: Document Out-of-State Experience**

The BBS generally accepts prior experience and supervision from those holding a valid out-of-state license. For details, visit [www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate\\_lcs.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate_lcs.shtml).

*"The Board's statutes (Business and Professions Code Section 4996.17) set forth different requirements depending on how long the applicant 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, which is found in the LCSW Application. If you have been licensed as a clinical social worker in another state for less than four years, you must provide verification of completion 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, which is available in the LCSW Application."*

## **Step 3: Obtain Required Post-Master's Coursework**

The California Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS) Statutes and Regulations requires qualified out-of-state licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs) who are applying for a California license to complete board-approved post-master's coursework prior to submitting an LCSW application.

Qualified out-of-state applicants must complete the following coursework before submitting an LCSW application:

1. Alcoholism and Other Chemical Substance Dependency (15 Hr)
2. Human Sexuality (10 Hr)
3. Child Abuse Assessment, Detection, and Reporting (7 Hr) *This training must be specific to California laws.*
4. Spousal/Partner Abuse Assessment, Detection, and Intervention (15 Hr)

**As of January 1, 2014**, qualified out-of-state applicants must complete the four courses listed above, in addition to the fifth requirement listed below:

5. California Law and Ethics (18 Hr) *This training must be specific to California laws and ethics.*

Visit the BBS website for details: [www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs\\_requirement.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs_requirement.shtml).

The board allows registrants to obtain all of the required post-master's coursework through online or in-person courses as long as the training meets the specific requirements outlined in the *BBS Statutes and Regulations*, and is offered through an approved provider. With the exception of child abuse and law and ethics, coursework requirements can also be met through university courses *if* the course appears on an official master's level transcript.

For details, refer to the *BBS Statutes and Regulations*, Chapter 14, §4996.17. ACCEPTANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE GAINED OUTSIDE OF CALIFORNIA, found at the bottom of page 88. [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf).

### **NASW-California is an Approved Provider**

The NASW-California Chapter offers board approved in-person and online courses that can be used to meet all coursework requirements.

- Live Courses: For details about required pre-license in-person courses, visit [www.naswca.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=110](http://www.naswca.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=110).
- Online Courses: For details about required pre-license online courses, visit [www.socialworkweb.com/nasw/choose/law\\_and\\_ethics.cfm](http://www.socialworkweb.com/nasw/choose/law_and_ethics.cfm).

### **Keep Original Certificates**

When filing the LCSW application packet, the BBS requires all applicants to submit the original copies of the certificates of completion for all coursework. It is important that applicants keep certificates in a safe place, as it can be difficult and expensive to replace original copies.

## **Step 4: Submit LCSW Application Packet**

### **LCSW License Application Packet**

Applicants file the LCSW license application packet and, if approved, become eligible to take the first of the two existing examinations, which are both timed and computerized. Over the last two years, the board has experienced significant delays in processing applications. Consequently, it can take from two to six months to learn whether the application has been approved to sit for this first exam.

For the LCSW application packet, visit [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcsapp.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcsapp.pdf).

For information regarding application processing, visit [www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/index.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/index.shtml).

## **Avoid the Most Common Error**

The board reports that the most common error is failing to follow the instructions, i.e., not filling in all required information or providing the necessary documentation, etc. If the application is incomplete, the application will be returned and must be resubmitted, which can significantly delay sitting for exams.

## **NASW Recommendation**

When the associate is assured that the LCSW application is complete, it is wise to: (1) make a copy of the entire application packet and store it in a safe place; and (2) place the application, fee, and original supervision forms, other required documents, and certificates of completion in one envelope and mail it using "Certified Mail." By doing this, the applicant will have a receipt with the date the BBS received the packet.

## **Eligibility Confirmation**

The Board will mail a letter to applicants confirming their eligibility to sit for the first examination, or indicating the applicant isn't eligible. If the applicant is deemed ineligible, the letter delineates the specific requirements that must be met before the person can reapply.

### **BBS Announcement: LCSW Exam Restructure Scheduled January 1, 2016**

As of October 2013, it was announced that the LCSW exam restructure will take place on January 1, 2016. On this date, the two current exams will be replaced with the following two exams: (1) California Law and Ethics Exam, and (2) ASWB Clinical Level Exam. To stay current on new BBS regulations and changes, subscribe to receive BBS e-mail alerts at <https://www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php>.

## **Step 5: Pass Standard Written Exam**

### **The LCSW Standard Written Exam Application**

Once deemed eligible, applicants receive a letter confirming their eligibility and providing instructions for making a reservation to sit for the first examination. As mentioned previously, both exams are timed and computerized. A fee must be paid each time applicants apply to take an exam whether it is their first or fourth time taking the exam. To download the LCSW examination/re-exam application, visit [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcsexapp.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcsexapp.pdf).

Psychological Services (PSI) administers the Board's licensure examinations and has testing centers located throughout the state offering testing five to six days a week. Applicants must refer to the candidate handbook (website listed below) for the exact locations of testing centers and other information. The Board states that candidates should not attempt to schedule a reservation to sit for either exam *until* receiving eligibility confirmation. The Board suggests making a reservation either by calling PSI or submitting an online form at least thirty days prior to the preferred testing dates.

- For details regarding the *Standard Written Examination Candidate Handbook*, refer to [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lcs\\_swhbk.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lcs_swhbk.pdf).

- For details regarding the *Written Clinical Vignette Examination Candidate Handbook*, [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lcs\\_cvhbkc.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lcs_cvhbkc.pdf).

### **Testing Accommodations**

The Board and PSI will provide fair and reasonable test accommodations to applicants who substantiate a need due to physical or mental disability or qualified medical condition. Those whose primary language is not English may also request special accommodations. However, applicants who are seeking special accommodations must apply early and allow the Board a min of 120 days or more to process requests.

### **California Exams are State Specific**

States vary greatly in social work employment and licenses. Some states offer social work certificates and several levels of licenses. One commonality among all other 49 states is that they accept results from the clinical level Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Exam. However, the two LCSW examinations utilized in California are specific to this state and no other exam is accepted at this time (2013).

### **BBS Exam Information Brochure**

The BBS provides a brochure that candidates should read *prior* to creating a study plan or submitting the LCSW license application. For examination information, visit [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/exam\\_info\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/exam_info_brochure.pdf).

### **Exam Stipulations**

- Once applicants have been deemed eligible to sit for exams, they must take the exam within one year of the eligibility date.
- If applicants take and fail the exam, they must wait a minimum of 160 days from the date of failure before applying to retake it.
- Each time the exam is retaken, applicants must submit an application and fee, which can take from two to six months to process.
- Once deemed eligible to sit for exams, applicants must take at least one exam per year to keep their file active.

### **Exam Pass Rates**

To better understand the examinations, it is important to view the exam pass rates on the board's website at [www.bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam\\_stats.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam_stats.shtml).

## **Step 6: Pass Written Clinical Vignette Exam**

Once applicants have successfully passed the standard written exam, they will need to submit an application to apply for the clinical vignette exam. Download the LCSW request for examination/re-exam application at [www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcsexapp.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcsexapp.pdf).



## Step 7: Work under Licensed Professional Until Licensed

Once applicants submit the LCSW license application packet, they may continue to provide psychotherapy until they receive their LCSW **if** they are supervised by a licensed mental health professional (LCSW, MFT, LPCC, licensed psychologist, etc.) who assumes legal responsibility for their work until they are licensed. Out-of-state applicants (working as an ASW) and their supervisors must keep in mind that courts expect that both parties will be able to: (a) demonstrate sufficient and appropriate supervision activity; (b) meet all legal and professional standards; and (c) provide services that meet the California standard of care. If there should be a lawsuit, the ASW, his or her supervisor, and the agency will likely be called into court and held accountable.

### Important Reminders

Applicants, who are registered with the board as ASWs, cannot work as an independent consultant or contractor (utilizing the IRS 1099 tax form) until they obtain a valid California LCSW license. The following was copied from Section §4996.28 in the *BBS Laws and Regulations*.

*(b) A registration as an associate clinical social worker may be renewed a maximum of five times. When no further renewals are possible, an applicant may apply for and obtain a new associate clinical social worker registration if the applicant meets all requirements for registration in effect at the time of his or her application for a new associate clinical social worker registration. An applicant who is issued a subsequent associate registration pursuant to this subdivision may be employed or volunteer in any allowable work setting except private practice.*

## Section 4: Common Applicant Mistakes

- Failing to research and understand California's licensing process and requirements *prior* to beginning the process.
- Failing to utilize appropriate resources to answer questions pertaining to licensing requirements *prior* to key deadlines.
- Failing to be proactive and to take full responsibility for the process and requirements.
- Failing to become familiar with the BBS website and referring to it frequently.
- Failing to download applications and forms from the Board's website just *prior* to completing them; consequently, submitting out-of-date applications and forms.
- Failing to accurately complete the applications and forms, or not submitting originals when required; therefore, causing lengthy delays.
- Failing to create and implement a study plan with specific strategies four to six months *prior* to sitting for exams.
- Failing to renew their ASW registration on time each year.

- 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 approved providers and keeping the original certificates of completion.
- Once deemed eligible to sit for exams, failing to sit for an exam at least once each year until both exams are passed.
- Failing to seek answers from experts such as the BBS staff or NASW-CA staff.
- Failing to understand the LCSW licensing process can be lengthy and the “average” amount of time that it takes qualified, out-of-state licensed applicants to complete the process is two to three years.

## **Section 5: Case Example of Out-of-State Applicant**

Jennifer, MSW, LCSW, and PhD, has an LCSW both in Texas and Arizona. She has practiced as a psychotherapist for 14 years, is a certified substance abuse counselor in Texas, and has been in private practice for ten years.

- Q.** Can Jennifer work in a private practice setting while sitting for exams (i.e. working towards meeting the requirements for a California license)?
- A.** Yes. If Jennifer is employed by a California licensed mental health professional (LCSW, LMFT, LPCC, licensed psychologist, etc.) in private practice, and this licensed professional assumes legal responsibility for her cases. Jennifer would have to register with the BBS as an ASW and receive a registration number prior to performing psychotherapy with clients.
- Q.** Can Jennifer collect fees from clients?
- A.** No. The law does not allow an ASW to bill a fee, monetary or otherwise. Unless volunteering, associates must be paid as an employee utilizing W-2 forms.
- Q.** If she registers as an ASW, does Jennifer have to place this information on her business card?
- A.** Yes. According to regulations, all associates must inform clients that they are unlicensed in California and under the supervision of a licensed supervisor prior to performing professional services.
- Q.** Jennifer took several child abuse courses pertaining to Texas and Arizona laws and regulations. Does she have to take another child abuse course to meet California’s requirement?
- A.** Yes. The requirement stipulates that the child abuse coursework must be specific to California laws, regulations, and procedures appropriate for this state.

## Section 6: Summary of Related Resources

Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS)	<a href="http://www.bbs.ca.gov">www.bbs.ca.gov</a>
BBS Staff Directory	<a href="http://www.bbs.ca.gov/staff_directory.shtml">www.bbs.ca.gov/staff_directory.shtml</a>
NASW-California Chapter Website	<a href="http://www.naswca.org">www.naswca.org</a>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For questions about licensing requirements, e-mail <a href="mailto:naswca@naswca.org">naswca@naswca.org</a>.</li><li>• For online pre-license courses, visit <a href="http://www.socialworkweb.com/nasw">www.socialworkweb.com/nasw</a>.</li><li>• For live pre-license courses, visit <a href="http://www.naswca.org">www.naswca.org</a> under "education."</li><li>• For questions about NASW member services e-mail <a href="mailto:membership@naswca.org">membership@naswca.org</a>.</li></ul>
NASW National Website	<a href="http://www.socialworkers.org">www.socialworkers.org</a>
NASW Help Starts Here Website	<a href="http://www.helpstartshere.org">www.helpstartshere.org</a>
California Society for Clinical Social Work	<a href="http://www.clinicalsocialworksociety.org">www.clinicalsocialworksociety.org</a>
The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB)	<a href="http://www.aswb.org">www.aswb.org</a>
The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)	<a href="http://www.cswe.org">www.cswe.org</a>