



National Association of Social Workers ~ California Chapter

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

This document reflects the January 1, 2016 LCSW licensure and exam process for practitioners who hold a valid LCSW license in another state.

California Licensing Board Exam Information as of January 2016

The California licensing board, the Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS), provides information about the two new LCSW exams at http://bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam_news.shtml. This webpage outlines critical information about “how the exam changes will impact” new and existing registrants. Additionally, the BBS included pertinent information and two helpful charts in the *BBS Winter 2016 Newsletter*, which can be accessed at www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/newsletters/winter_2016.pdf.

Important

The term “registrant” refers to an individual who is registered with the California licensing board (BBS) as an associate clinical social worker (ASW), marriage and family therapist intern (IMF), etc. and who is gaining hours towards a mental health license while under the supervision of a licensed practitioner.

Working with the BBS staff and LCSW consultants, the NASW-CA chapter updates this document annually. However, the content may not reflect all of the most recent changes to regulations and requirements. Each registrant has the responsibility for ensuring that they are obtaining the most recent and updated information; consequently, registrants must stay abreast of changes through the BBS website and by subscribing to the BBS automated email alerts at <https://www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php>. This document was last updated on January 20, 2016.

Outline of Topics

Section 1: Social Work Employment and License in California

Section 2: California’s Licensing Board – The Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS)

Section 3: Steps to a California LCSW License

Section 4: The Most Common Applicant Mistakes

Section 5: Summary of Resources

Section 1: Social Work Employment and License in California

Social Work Licensing and Employment Requirements Vary from State to State

Social work licensing and employment 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/> and utilize the search tool to find a specific state's social work licensing board and related information.

Employment as a Social Worker in California

In California, individuals with MSW degrees can be employed as social workers without holding a social work license. However, to hold oneself out to the public as a clinical social worker or to offer one's services as "psychotherapy," the social worker must obtain a MSW from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited school and earn a California LCSW, the one and only social work license in California.

Clinical Social Work and Psychotherapy Defined by California Law

The following excerpt was copied from Chapter 14 of the California Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS) *Statutes and Regulations*, which is an annually updated PDF document that can be accessed at 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.

Social Work Job Search in California

For strategies, resources, job announcements, and networking opportunities, visit the NASW California Chapter website at <http://www.naswca.org/?156> under "Career Center."

Section 2: California Licensing Board – The BBS

The California State Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS)

As the licensing and regulatory body, the primary function of the California State Board of Behavioral Sciences (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 BBS issues and annually updates the document titled, *Statutes and Regulations Related to LCSWs, LMFTs, LEPs, and LPCCs*. Chapter 14 of this document is specific to clinical social work. The entire PDF document is available at www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf.

It is most productive for registrants (ASWs, IMFs, IPCCs, etc.) to view the functions of the BBS as positive and necessary. Applicants must be proactive and take full responsibility for knowing, understanding, and meeting all licensure requirements. The deadlines are part of the regulations; consequently, there can be no exceptions regardless of a registrant's circumstances.

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

Contact Info: www.bbs.ca.gov/contact.shtml

BBS Subscriber List

The BBS uses this free, automated email service to notify registrants and licensees about updates and changes. Subscribe today at www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php.

Section 3: Basic Steps to Becoming a California LCSW

In the following pages of the document, each of the following steps are discussed in detail.

Step 1: Obtain Required California Law and Ethics Training

Step 2: If Applicable, Register as an Associate Social Worker (ASW)

Step 3: Meet the Clinical Experience Requirements

Step 4: Pass the California Law and Ethics Exam

Step 5: Complete All Mandated Pre-license Coursework

Step 6: Pass the ASWB Clinical Level Exam (if not passed previously)

Step 7: Submit the LCSW Application

Step 1—Obtain Required California Law and Ethics Training

Individuals who hold a MSW degree from outside of California are required to obtain 18 hours of California law and ethics training in order to apply as an associate social worker (ASW), which is the California designation for those registered with the licensing board and obtaining hours towards licensure. For details, visit www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs_requirement.shtml.

- (1) Applicants who earned an MSW degree from outside of California must obtain 18 hours of California law and professional ethics training through a BBS recognized CE provider *PRIOR* to registering as an associate social worker (ASW).
- (2) Applicants who earned an MSW degree from a California university do not need to obtain this training because the BBS has determined that this subject matter has been incorporated into their California MSW programs. This is not to say that candidates with California degrees will be completely prepared for the Law and Ethics Exam. In all likelihood, all exam candidates will need to study and prepare for this exam.

If the individual holding a valid LCSW from outside of California chooses not to register as an ASW (Reminder: the ASW number allows them to perform psychotherapy under a licensed CA mental health practitioner while going through the licensure process), he or she still must complete the mandated 18 hours of law and ethics coursework before sitting for the ASWB Clinical Level Exam, the second required exam.

BBS Recognized California Law and Ethics Training

The NASW-CA Online Program is a BBS recognized provider of the 18 hour California law and ethics training. To view the pre-licensure online courses or to register, visit www.socialworkweb.com/nasw/choose/pre.cfm#prelicense_law_ethics. Once courses are paid for, the online courses are available 24/7 from any computer for 24 months.

Step 2: If Applicable, Register as an Associate Social Worker (ASW)

Do I need to register as an associate social worker (ASW)?

The answer to this question is determined by whether the out-of-state licensed applicant will be performing clinical social work and/or psychotherapy while working toward a California license. The following bullet points clarify when it is necessary to register as an ASW. For details regarding these requirements, refer to the *BBS Statutes and Regulations*, Chapter 14, Sections 4996.14 through 4996.18.

- To perform clinical social work and/or 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 clinical social workers from out-of-state may find employment where they perform psychotherapy, as long as they are registered as an ASW and supervised by a California licensed mental health professional. In this scenario, the California licensed professional assumes legal responsibility for the services provided by the

out-of-state LCSW. The out-of-state LCSW must apply and receive an ASW number *PRIOR* to assuming a role in which they provide psychotherapy or clinical social work.

- Those holding a valid LCSW from another state may choose to work in a setting where they do not perform clinical social work and/or psychotherapy. In this case, the applicant does not have to register with the Board as an ASW.

Complete ASW Application

Download the ASW application at www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/aswapp.pdf. Because the BBS regularly revises applications, download the application when ready to complete it. Before submitting an ASW application, ensure that the official transcript has the qualifying degree posted. Ensure that questions about criminal history are answered accurately. If the ASW application is rejected because it is incomplete, all deficiencies must be corrected within one year of notification; otherwise, the BBS abandons the file.

BBS Online Renewal System

The following excerpt was copied from the BBS website regarding the online "BreEZe System," which can be assessed on the BBS website at www.bbs.ca.gov.

The BBS is pleased to introduce the Department of Consumer Affairs' BreEZe Online Services for individuals licensed or registered with the Department of Consumer Affairs or one of its Boards or Bureaus. Current services available include: Change of Address, Renew a License or Registration and Verify a License or Registration.

The ASW registration must be renewed annually. It is registrants' responsibility to send in the renewal application on time, whether they receive a renewal notice from the BBS or not. For details, visit www.bbs.ca.gov/licensees/renewal_registrant.shtml.

Once registered with the BBS as an ASW or LCSW, any changes to one's address must be reported to the BBS in writing within 30 days of the change. Visit www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/change_address.pdf.

NASW-CA Recommendations

It is advisable for applicants to maintain one or two files for all license-related information. Having one location for applications, transcripts, certificates, forms, etc. can help to avoid some of the most common pitfalls.

Payment as an ASW

An ASW may be employed or serve as a volunteer. ASWs who are employed, must be paid as employees. ASWs cannot be paid, or serve, as independent consultants or contractors (utilizing the IRS 1099 tax form) until they have obtained a California LCSW license.

Step 3: Meet the Clinical Experience Requirements

The BBS does not have reciprocity with any other state licensing board.

The following excerpt was copied from the BBS website outlining the required experience for applicants holding a valid LCSW license from another state. For more details about education and experience requirements, visit www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate_lcs.shtml.

Experience Requirement for Out-of-State LCSWs

The Board's statutes (Business and Professions Code Section 4996.17) set forth different requirements depending on how long you have held a clinical social worker license in another state.

*If you have been licensed as a clinical social worker in another state **for at least four years**, you have met the Board's experience requirements for licensure. You will document this with the Clinical Social Worker Verification of Licensure/Registration/Certification in another state form. This form is available in the LCSW application.*

*If you have been licensed as a clinical social worker in another state **for less than four years**, you must provide verification that you completed 3,200 hours of supervised work experience and 104 weeks of supervision.*

If the licensing body in your state does not have equivalent requirements, time actively licensed as a clinical social worker in your state shall be accepted at a rate of 100 hours per month up to a maximum of 1,200 hours. You will document this with the Clinical Social Worker Verification of Licensure/Registration/Certification in another state form. This form is available in the LCSW application.

Please refer to the Board's [Statutes and Regulations](#) (Business and Professions Code Section 4996.17) for more information regarding licensing requirements for applicants with out-of-state licenses.

Step 4—Pass the California Law and Ethics Exam

As of January 1, 2016, ASWs must pass the California Law and Ethics Exam, complete the required 3200 hours of clinical experience, and obtain all required post-master's coursework *BEFORE* they can apply to take the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Clinical Level Exam. Only after passing the ASWB Clinical Level Exam, can ASWs submit the LCSW application.

The California Law and Ethics Exam (1st CA Exam)

Within the first year of registering as an ASW, and before their first renewal, ASWs must sit for the California Law and Ethics Exam. The registrant must take this exam at least once per year until successfully passing it.

1. If successful, the ASW has completed the first of two required exams for licensure.
2. If unsuccessful, the ASW must take a 12 hour law and ethics training before applying to retake this exam. This requirement is detailed in the *BBS Statutes and Regulations*.

§4992.09. CALIFORNIA LAW AND ETHICS EXAMINATION

(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.

The BBS provides information about the California Law and Ethics Exam on its website at http://bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam_news.shtml.

A California Law and Ethics Examination will replace the Standard Written Examination for LMFT and LCSW applicants. The Law & Ethics Examination will be a separate exam for each license type. It is designed to assess the applicant's knowledge of and ability to apply legal and ethical standards relating to clinical practice. This will consist of 75 multiple-choice items administered over a 90 minute period. The re-exam waiting period is 90 days. The [Law and Ethics Exam Plan](#) outline further information about these exams.

The following "content outline" was copied from the 11-page PDF document "LCSW California Law and Ethics Examination Plan," which delineates the exam content and much more. All registrants should print and carefully the "Plan" and the "Candidate Handbook" listed under "Resources."

LCSW California Law and Ethics Examination Content Outline

A. Law (40%)

- | | |
|--|------------|
| <i>A. Confidentiality, Privilege, and Consent</i> | <i>14%</i> |
| <i>B. Limits to Confidentiality/Mandated Reporting</i> | <i>16%</i> |
| <i>C. Legal Standards for Professional Practice</i> | <i>10%</i> |

II. Ethics (60%)

- | | |
|---|------------|
| <i>A. Professional Competence and Preventing Harm</i> | <i>18%</i> |
| <i>B. Therapeutic Relationship/Services</i> | <i>27%</i> |
| <i>C. Business Practices and Policies</i> | <i>15%</i> |

Resources

- LCSW Law and Ethics Examination Plan (including content outline)
http://bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lcsw_2016-law-ethics_exam_plan.pdf

- [LCSW Law and Ethics Examination Candidate Handbook \(2016\)](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lcle_handbook_01042016.pdf)
- [BBS Exam Information](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam_plans.shtml)
- BBS Recognized Mandated 12-hour Coursework: The NASW-CA Online Program offers the 12 hour mandated law and ethics training. For details, visit www.socialworkweb.com/nasw/choose/pre.cfm.

Step 5: Complete All Pre-license Coursework

California Mandated Pre-license Coursework

Applicants are mandated to obtain specific post-masters coursework from BBS recognized continuing education (CE) providers and to submit the original copies of the certificates of completion. This required coursework must be completed PRIOR to sitting for the ASWB Clinical Level Exam (the 2nd exam). The following was copied from the BBS website at http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/outofstate_lcs.shtml.

The coursework may be completed through a college or university that is either regionally accredited or approved by the Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education, a continuing education provider approved by the Board, or a governmental entity. Coursework does not ever "expire" and may be gained at the undergraduate level.

For BBS Recognized CE Providers, visit http://bbs.ca.gov/licensees/ce_licensees.shtml.

Education

Any out of state LCSW applicant must prove completion of all of California's education requirements, including:

A master's degree from an accredited school of social work.

Additional coursework:

- *Child Abuse Assessment and Reporting*
 - *7 hours - Must be based on California law*
 - *See Title 16, California Code of Regulations (CCR) section 1807.2 for specific content required*
- *Human Sexuality*
 - *10 hours - see Title 16, CCR section 1807 for specific content required*
- *Alcoholism and Other Chemical Substance Dependency*
 - *15 hours - see Title 16, CCR section 1810 for specific content required*
- *Spousal or Partner Abuse Assessment, Detection, and Intervention*
 - *15-hours – see BPC section 4996.2(f) for specific content required*
- *Aging, Long Term Care, and Elder/Dependent Adult Abuse*
 - *10 Hours ONLY for those who entered a degree program on or after 1/1/2004*

- *For all others this is not a requirement*
- *California Law and Professional Ethics*
 - *18 hours - see BPC section 4996.17 for specific content required*

In the last bullet point, "see BPC section 4996.17" refers to a section in the California Business and Professions Code, which can be accessed at <http://law.justia.com/codes/california/2012/bpc/division-2/chapter-14/article-4/section-4996.17>

BBS Approved Pre-licensure Coursework

NASW-California Chapter is a BBS recognized CE provider and offers all of the required pre-licensure coursework through both live and online venues. For online courses, visit www.socialworkweb.com/nasw and, for live courses, visit www.naswca.org/?page=163.

Keep Original Certificates

When filling out the LCSW application, the BBS requires registrants to submit the original copies of the certificates of completion for all coursework. This is true unless proof of the requirement is met with a graduate level transcript. It is important that applicants keep certificates in a safe place, as it can be difficult and expensive to replace originals.

Step 6: Pass the ASWB Clinical Level Exam

As indicated previously, licensure applicants must pass the California Law and Ethics Exam and obtain all required pre-licensure coursework *BEFORE* they can apply to take the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Clinical Level Exam. In the case of practitioners with a valid LCSW from another state who have previously taken and passed the ASWB Clinical Level Exam, they must provide proof of a passing score to the BBS. Once all other requirements are met, the final step is to submit the LCSW application.

The ASWB Clinical Level Exam (2nd exam)

1. If successful in passing the exam or in providing proof of a passing score, applicants can submit a LCSW application packet.
2. If unsuccessful, applicants can retake this exam upon payment of the required fees.

For details regarding the ASWB Exams, as well as study guides, visit <https://www.aswb.org/exam-candidates/about-the-exams/>.

The following excerpt was copied from the ASWB website.

The exams provided by the Association of Social Work Boards are used in every U.S. state as well the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and British Columbia. ASWB develops and maintains four categories of social work licensure exams: Bachelors, Masters, Advanced Generalist, and Clinical. Not every jurisdiction uses all four categories, so candidates must be sure to check with their individual boards to find out which examinations are appropriate for the jurisdiction in which they are seeking licensure.

Each examination contains 170 four-option, multiple-choice questions designed to measure minimum competencies at four categories of practice. Only 150 of the 170 items are scored; the remaining 20 questions are pretest items included to measure their effectiveness as items on future examinations. These pretest items are scattered randomly throughout the examination. Candidates have four hours to complete the test, which is administered electronically.

Resources

- ASWB Clinical Level Exam Content Outline (PDF)
<https://www.aswb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ClinicalKSAs.pdf>
- ASWB Examination Candidate Handbook (PDF)
<https://www.aswb.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Candidate-Handbook.pdf>
- ASWB Exam Online Practice Test
<https://www.aswb.org/exam-candidates/>
- BBS Exam Information
http://www.bbs.ca.gov/exams/exam_plans.shtml

Step 7: Submit the LCSW Application

The last step in obtaining a California LCSW license takes place after the registrant passes the ASWB Clinical Level Exam. It is at this time that the registrant must download and submit the LCSW application found on the BBS website at www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/forms/lcs/lcsapp.pdf.

Most Common Application Errors

According to the BBS, nearly 40% of all ASW/LCSW applications are returned. They have stated that the most common two errors in submitting an LCSW application are either failing to follow the instructions or failing to provide required information or documentation. If incomplete, the BBS will return the application, which inevitably causes delays.

Important Notation

As indicated in the BBS regulations detailed earlier in this document, registrants must work under a qualified professional until licensed. Registrants must be supervised by a licensed mental health professional who assumes legal responsibility for their work until they receive their California LCSW license. Once the registrant is deemed eligible to sit for the ASWB Clinical Level Exam, the BBS still requires the registrant to obtain one hour per week of supervision in each setting they are working. However, supervision is still required for all work that is presented to the public as "clinical social work" or "psychotherapy." It is critical that registrants and supervisors continue to meet regularly and for whatever time is necessary to ensure clients' wellbeing, because courts expect both parties can (a) demonstrate sufficient 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, both the registrant and the supervisor will be called into court and held accountable.

Section 4: The Most 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 take full responsibility for the process and requirements.
- Failing to become very 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 delays.
- Failing to practice under the supervision of a clinical supervisor that meets all of the BBS requirements and who stays abreast of the regulations and requirements.
- Failing to find appropriate clinical work settings or receive adequate supervision that can support the kind of professional development needed to prepare for licensure exams.
- Failing to consistently track the hours of experience and clinical supervision utilizing the log provided by the Board.
- 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 create a study plan that will adequately prepare the registrant to pass the two licensure exams; a plan that incorporates specific strategies and is implemented four to six months *prior* to sitting for exams.
- Failing to renew the ASW registration each year on time and failing to file a written change of 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.
- 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 authoritative answers from experts such as the BBS staff or NASW-CA staff, rather than asking other registrants or colleagues.
- Failing to understand that the LCSW licensing process can be lengthy and the *average* amount of time to complete the process is four to six years.
- Failing to consider that it may be necessary to pay a licensed practitioner to provide supervision and to have more than one supervisor to obtain the 3200 clinical hours.

Section 5: Summary of Resources

Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS)

www.bbs.ca.gov

- Overview of the LCSW License Requirements
www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs_requirement.shtml
- Navigating the LCSW License Process
www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/lcs_presentation.shtml
- *BBS Statutes and Regulation* (Chapter 14 is specific to Clinical Social Work)
www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf
- Winter 2016 Newsletter (info about new licensure exams)
www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/newsletters/winter_2016.pdf
- BBS Forms and Publications www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml
- BBS Statutes and Regulations www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf
- BBS Contact Info www.bbs.ca.gov/contact.shtml

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www.naswca.org

- For online courses, visit www.socialworkweb.com/nasw.
- For live courses, visit www.naswca.org/?page=163.
- For NASW member services questions, email membership@naswca.org.
- For licensing questions, email naswca@naswca.org or tatyana@naswca.org.

National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

www.socialworkers.org www.helpstartshere.org www.socialworkportal.org

The Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB)

www.aswb.org

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)

www.cswe.org