



AB 1860 (Ward) Substance abuse treatment: certification FACT SHEET

Background:

Under current state law, all individuals who are not licensed professionals of the healing arts are required to register with a substance use disorder (SUD) counselor certification organization in order to provide counseling services. While this registration requirement is intended to protect clients and ensure ethics and confidentiality—the impact of the requirement is that it disincentivizes and discourages qualified marriage and family trainees and other master-level clinicians completing their required graduate school practicums/ fieldwork from working in SUD treatment programs by having to also register with a certifying organization as if they were on the career path to become a certified SUD counselor.

In order to register with a certifying organization, an individual must complete a 9-hour course, complete an application, sign code of conduct and scope of practice agreement, and pay a fee.

Internships and Practicums:

All accredited social work and other graduate-level clinical programs require field placement, although the specific types of placement and hours required vary by program and degree level. Field experience enables graduate students to practice skills learned in their coursework and observe professionals at work. Field placements prepare future clinicians/LPHAs by providing them with practical work experience and practice dealing with challenges and issues they are likely to face on the job. Practicum student interns also give back to their communities while they hone their skills.

Practicum graduate student interns work under close supervision of on-site licensed professionals in the agencies where they are placed. Interns also receive ongoing guidance and support from off-site educators at their university program who supervise their field placements. During a practicum internship, students observe and assist professional LPHA clinicians. They learn to apply their academic training to the real world as they observe trained professionals and practice skills.

Practicum graduate student interns completing their fieldwork/ practicum can only work in a placement site that 1) lawfully and regularly provides counseling or psychotherapy; 2) provides oversight to ensure that the work at the setting meets the experience and supervision requirements set out in statute and within scope of practice; 3) approved by

the school and has a written agreement with the work setting; 4) meets strict supervision requirements including ratios of supervised time vs. client time.

These requirements are above and beyond the SUD counselor registration requirement and it is unnecessary for graduate students completing their practicum at a university approved worksite with an agreement with their university from also becoming registered with an SUD counselor certifying organization.

The practical impact is that it reduces the available workforce at SUD treatment programs and also prevents the pipeline of marriage and family therapists, professional clinical counselors, and social workers from gaining key experience in treating SUD conditions. As the state strives towards integrated care for co-occurring mental health and SUD conditions—it is critical that the workforce have competencies in care of both conditions. It is imperative that the state support more than just an SUD counselor career path, but also an SUD LPHA career path.

Statutory Fix:

Health and Safety Code Section 11833 (b) (1) Except for licensed professionals, *and graduate student interns participating in supervised internships affiliated with graduate university programs in psychology, social work, marriage and family therapy, or counseling and who are completing their supervised practicum hours working in a program described in subdivision (a)*, the department shall require that an individual providing counseling services working within a program described in subdivision (a) be registered with or certified by a certifying organization approved by the department to register and certify counselors.

Benefits:

By removing the requirement to have graduate student interns completing supervised practicum hours from having to register with a certifying organization there are several benefits:

- Reduces barriers to increasing SUD workforce.
- Increases competencies of future social workers, marriage and family therapists, psychologists, and clinical counselors in substance use disorder treatment by expanding access to completing practicum hours in SUD treatment program
- Helps support a bona fide SUD LPHA career path

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Support (As of March 3rd, 2022):

- CAADPE (Sponsor)
- County Behavioral Health Directors Association
- CA Alliance of Child and Family Services

Opposition:

- None known