



Government Affairs and Public Policy

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American Counseling Association Government Affairs and Public Policy 2024 Legislative Agenda

The American Counseling Association's policy agenda outlines critical priorities for promoting the counseling profession and furthering the ACA mission through state and federal advocacy.

2024 Federal Priorities

Developing Artificial Intelligence Regulations: The American Counseling Association (ACA) is committed to advocating for the development of responsible and ethical regulatory policies pertaining to Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the fields of mental health and counseling. As AI technology continues to advance, ACA recognizes the critical importance of engaging with the White House, U.S. Congress, and regulatory agencies to ensure that AI regulations prioritize the preservation of the clinician-client relationship and safeguard the well-being of individuals seeking mental health services.

ACA will actively work to educate and collaborate with regulatory bodies to emphasize the significance of incorporating mental health considerations in AI regulations, thereby fostering an environment that upholds the integrity and effectiveness of counseling practices while leveraging the potential benefits of AI innovation. During the year ACA is committed to:

- Engaging with the White House Administration to offer our expertise in supporting regulations.
- Working with the U.S. House Artificial Intelligence Caucus, and members of the U.S. Senate to provide guidance on protecting counselors and clients through legislative and regulatory efforts.
- Providing written guidance and support to the Deputy National Advisory for Cyber and Emerging Technology.

Medicare Implementation and Guidance: Medicare is the primary insurance provider for approximately 60 million Americans, including adults aged 65 and over and individuals living with disabilities. By 2030, the number of beneficiaries is expected to surpass 80 million. In December of 2022, Congress voted to pass the 1.7 trillion-dollar fiscal year (FY) 2023 omnibus package, H.R.2617, entitled the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023. Among the provisions included in the omnibus was the Mental Health Access Improvement Act (S.828/H.R.432), which would improve access to mental health services by permitting LPCs to be reimbursed by Medicare. Counselors are now eligible to enroll as Medicare providers. ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team has transitioned to:

- Collaborating with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to update regulatory language and internal systems that will help implement LPCs as Medicare providers.
- Providing resources for LPCs transitioning into becoming Medicare providers.

- Engaging licensed professional counselors in meetings and conversations around modernizing Medicare and providing a behavioral health-care pathway for millions of Americans.
- Continuing to advocate and educate in tandem with the Medicare Mental Health Workforce Coalition on behalf of LPCs.

School-Based Mental Health Services: ACA supports programs that make students safer at school, improve school climate and improve access to mental and behavioral health services at school. The Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) Grant under Title IV-A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a flexible block that is designed to ensure that districts have access to programs that foster safe and healthy students, provide students with a well-rounded education, and increase the effective use of technology in our nation's schools.

In order to continue increased investments in school-based mental health services and school counseling programs, the ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team will:

- Educate a wider array of Members of Congress, particularly those not on the education and funding committees, about the importance of and value of Title IV-A, with a focus on how the increased funding and flexibility is benefiting districts.
- Engage Department of Education representatives and urge them to make resources available to states and school districts to increase student-support services to meet recommended ratios of students to school counselors (250 students per counselor or 250:1).
- Advocate in tandem with the Title IV-A Coalition through targeted communication efforts and an effective legislative push.

Veterans Affairs: The increased hiring of LPMHCs within the Department of Veterans Affairs will reduce wait times for veterans seeking behavioral health services, as well as provide more career opportunities for licensed professional mental health counselors.

To continue the push for more LPMHC jobs in the Department of Veterans Affairs, the ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team will:

- Work with the congressional Veterans Affairs Committees and the Department of Veterans Affairs to increase access to behavioral health services provided by rehab counselors and LPMHCs to veterans.
- Educate Members of Congress and their staff on LPMHC education and training as it relates to treating veterans.

Tele-behavioral health: The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many people, by exacerbating mental health issues especially in rural areas, where there is limited access to behavioral health services. To help those affected as well as increase access to care, the ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team will:

- Advocate for the extension of tele-behavioral health provisions beyond the Public Health Emergency (PHE)

Career Counseling: To continue to increase investments in college and career counseling programs, the ACA Government Affairs and Public Policy team will:

- Champion improving the workforce by supporting federal legislation that provides more funding for college and career counseling programs.
- Push for Congress to prioritize critical new investments in career counseling to help students make informed choices, such as the Counseling for Career Choice Act.

2024 State Priorities

2024 State Policy Priorities

Counselors play a vital role in assuring the well-being of people in any given state. Due to challenging laws and regulations, the professionals that work to support their client's best interest are now facing challenges in how to serve their client's needs productively and legally. The American Counseling Association's state team is committed to:

- **Education and Empowerment of Members:** Working to empower ACA Branches and Divisions with the information they need to advocate with confidence on issues affecting their state and/or focus area, based on the values within the ACA Code of Ethics.
- **Advocacy Resources:** Creating relevant resources our members may use to advocate for the profession, themselves, and their clients.
- **Monitor and Guidance on Bills & Controversial Proposals:** Actively with our members monitor proposed state bills, regulations, and collaborate with our members to provide relevant guidance to our members in and out of state sessions.
- **Counseling Compact:** Continue working towards 50 states, the District of Columbia and our U.S. Territories becoming members of the Counseling Compact.
- **Advocacy Trainings:** Provide training to interested branches and divisions that are custom designed to support advocacy efforts in states. Please e-mail advocacy@counseling.org to inquire.

In 2024, ACA will continue our work with state legislatures and state agencies tasked with implementation of enacted legislation to ensure guidance is inclusive of counselors and states are issued the information necessary for providing critical mental health services. We will actively support states as they advocate for a stronger mental health infrastructure and enhance counseling awareness for policy making. To accomplish this, we will work with our national ACA network and allies to advance legislative priorities, to monitor key policy making issues and to ensure members receive the tools necessary for effective advocacy. Such policies include but are not limited to:

- **Licensure Portability:** Supporting states in meeting criteria for the Counseling Compact by enhancing state educational requirements, ensuring diagnostic authority for practitioners, and other policies as needed.
- **Privacy Rights:** Championing necessary counselor autonomy and client/doctor privacy in every state.
- **Tele-Health Expansion:** Monitoring tele-behavioral health developments.
- **Supporting School Counselors:** Encouraging funding and appropriations for enhanced school-based counseling efforts.
- **Community Based Mental Health:** Promoting additional resources for critical community-based mental health programs.
- **Program Expansion Efforts:** Highlighting the necessity of violence prevention programming, including mental health services, drug-use-disorder, and suicide prevention, in policy discourse at all levels of government.
- **Student Loan Forgiveness:** Monitoring student loan repayment programs specific to the counseling profession.
- **Resources to Support Reimbursement:** Expanding insurance coverage for mental health providers, including insurance parity.
- **Department of Defense:** Prioritizing mental health services for the military community.

The ACA Mission & Strategic Plan:

ACA leadership came together to create a new strategic framework for ACA's future. Please take a look at the ACA Mission & Strategic Plan.

<https://www.counseling.org/about-us/about-aca/our-mission>

Our members make a substantial difference in ACA's efforts to advocate for licensed professional counselors. Legislators pay attention when they hear from you. Please sign up to receive [legislative updates](#) to effectively advocate for the profession.
