

Licensed Professional Counselors: Leading Providers of Mental Health

- **The American Counseling Association (ACA)** is the world’s largest not-for-profit association exclusively representing over 60,000 licensed professional counselors (LPCs) nationwide.
- **Headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, ACA was founded in 1952** to support the growth and enhancement of the counseling profession.
- **ACA proudly works with Congress on bipartisan policy solutions**, including successfully advocating to pass the [Mental Health Access Improvement Act](#) in 2022, which expanded the network of providers that can provide mental and behavioral health care to Medicare beneficiaries.

ACA’s Critical Role In Addressing America’s Mental Health Crisis

- **LPCs are highly trained professionals.** LPCs must earn an undergraduate degree and master’s degree in counseling, complete approximately two years of post-graduate clinical work, pass a national examination, and apply for state licensure.
- **Counselors often act as ‘first-responders’ in addressing clients’ mental health needs, many times in crisis.** Without counselors, millions of Americans in active need of help would be left untreated.
- **LPCs treat millions of clients annually across the mental health continuum**, helping them develop coping strategies and apply impactful solutions. They provide a range of services, from supporting clients through personal challenges to treating mental health conditions to crisis response. With a particular focus on prevention, they are also critical in addressing the nation’s opioid and substance use disorder epidemic.

ACA’s Federal Legislative Priorities Put Clients First

Strengthen the Counselor Workforce	Promote Clients’ Access to High-Quality, Consistent Mental Health Care	Embrace 21 st Century Counseling Care and Future Innovations
<p>Clients everyday are forced to delay necessary care due to the inadequate number of mental health providers available in the U.S., and the shortage is worsening.</p> <p>Congress must invest in the counseling workforce to further build the pipeline of professionals that regularly serve clients, including through federal grant and loan repayment programs.</p> <p>Congress should encourage access to cross-state licensure programs like ACA’s Counseling Compact, which allows LPCs to continue serving clients, even in remote areas.</p>	<p>Affordable, quality mental health care enables clients to manage conditions that would otherwise severely limit their social and economic participation in society.</p> <p>LPCs need adequate reimbursement across all practice settings. Such reimbursement enables counselors to maintain services and stay in network, safeguarding clients’ access to person-centered care and reducing their financial strain.</p> <p>Congress must build on HHS’s final rule that implements the <i>Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008</i> to require health plans to provide clients the same level of care for both mental and physical health services.</p>	<p>Mental health care delivery is changing at a rapid pace. Counselors support policies that encourage evidence-based, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate care.</p> <p>Artificial Intelligence (AI) is an important, evolving tool that Congress must properly regulate to avoid client harm while encouraging innovation.</p> <p>Congress should permanently expand affordable and equitable access to telehealth services, especially for rural communities that may have few in-person providers or lack access to consistent transportation.</p>

2nd Largest Group in the U.S. Behavioral Workforce

Average LPC Student Loan Debt: \$79,500

ACA’s Counselors with Part-time, Second Job: 29%

Number of Americans Living in a Mental Health Professional Shortage Area: 158 million people in 2022, 47% of the U.S. population

Number of Americans Diagnosed with Mental Illness or Substance Use Abuse: 84.2 million adults (2.7 million children)

High schoolers who report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness: Over 1/3rd