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Substance Abuse Counselors and Certification for California

Position Paper
Adopted April 18, 2008

The California Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives (CAADPE) is a statewide professional association of private non-profit and for-profit providers of addiction treatment and recovery services. CAADPE's members, collectively, are the largest employer of addiction services professionals in the state with over 7,000 employees. As employers, CAADPE members have a strong public service and business interest in professional counselor certification standards which are critical to providing the highest quality care to those affected by alcohol and drug use problems. CAADPE believes its interests coincide with those of the State of California: assuring public safety through ensuring the highest professional standards for addiction treatment.

Counselor credentialing and certification are the keys to assuring high professional standards. State regulations for certification of addiction treatment professionals must undergo rigorous public scrutiny to ensure that public safety concerns are met and workable certification standards are adopted and enforced. Many providers and consumer advocates are eager to participate in the public discussion regarding standards of practice and to contribute their expertise and professional perspectives. This public process will ensure that certification requirements enacted by the State reflect the most current research findings, experienced thinking, best practices, and be of the highest standards for professionals working in any setting. In that spirit, CAADPE's proposal is intended to open the current dialogue on counselor certification and to begin to address the larger issue of workforce development.

BASIC PREMISES:

1. The State of California is the single licensing and certification authority for the state. A single licensing and certification agency is necessary to provide objectivity, to properly manage current state regulations, and to maintain continuity of standards across many state departments. The State of California manages and oversees the licensing/certification process and quality assurance for professionals in other fields. The State should perform this same function in the area of addiction treatment certification. The State has been mistaken in delegating its authority for counselor certification to non-governmental entities and should now reclaim its authority. Historically, licensing/certification functions have been located in the Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs. However, the Department of Consumer Affairs has authority and responsibility for oversight of licensing and certification of most other professional licensing functions. Substance abuse certification should not be an exception.
2. The state of California must be the sole entity to set the standards for addiction treatment professionals, establish minimum qualifications, and ensure the standards are met. This function should not be delegated, as it now is, to the non-governmental certifying educational institutions that have the multiple and conflicting responsibilities for education, certification, and enforcement. Establishing state requirements and overseeing the certification fees would allow these non-governmental institutions to focus on educating students to meet the state's standards.
3. There should be one statewide standard of practice, one statewide standard of ethics, and one statewide standard of professional behavior. These required state certification standards should apply to all individuals working in the substance abuse treatment field regardless of venue and who performs services under the Federal TAP 21 guidelines, with the exemption of screening. This includes all substance abuse treatment settings – private, public, for profit, and not-for-profit sectors – in the state of California, Department of Corrections, and counties.

CAADPE PROPOSAL:

1. The Counselor/Professional Certificate must be issued by the State of California.
2. The State Certificate must be based on meeting the scope of practice as reflected in occupational analysis of the job skills knowledge and abilities for the various levels of staffing in addiction treatment settings.
3. The State shall adopt and enforce a single set of professional ethics and standards.
4. The certification, once issued, shall be valid for two years.
5. A minimum of 360 hours of classroom education shall be required.
6. A minimum of 2080 hours of supervised work experience shall be required.
7. A minimum of 1040 hours of internship shall be required with one half performed after the classroom education is completed. Supervision must be by a certified substance abuse professional.
8. A minimum of forty (40) hours of continuing education must be completed during the two years of the valid certification.
9. An exemption from certification is appropriate for the following classifications: Master Social Workers, Bachelor Social Worker or Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Licensed Psychiatric Technicians, Marriage and Family Therapists and Psychologists, Registered and Licensed Vocational nurses. This includes interns working in a career path for professional licensing and certification under the Department Consumer Affairs' Board of Behavior Services licensing. All who are eligible for exemption, however, must complete 20 hrs of CEU credits in Substance Abuse annually to maintain their exemption.
10. Individuals holding out-of-state addiction treatment license/certificate shall be required to pass the statewide standardized test to be certified to practice in California.
11. Criminal background checks shall be required of all, except those who are licensed professionals who already possess a professional license from the Department of Consumer Affairs. A waiver exemption process shall be established for those with previous felony convictions. Criteria for the criminal waivers shall be developed by the state in collaboration with major stakeholder employers. Waivers applications should have flexibility to accommodate individual assessment of the applicant.