

POSITION PAPER
Substance Use Disorder
Professional Licensing and Certification

The California Association of Alcohol and Drug Program Executives, Inc (CAADPE) is a statewide association of community-based nonprofit substance use disorder (SUD) treatment agencies, and includes co-occurring disorders. Its members provide SUD treatment and prevention services at over 300 sites throughout the state and constitute the infrastructure of the state's publicly funded SUD treatment service network. It is the only statewide association representing all modalities of SUD treatment programs.

CAADPE's position and analysis of any proposals for professional licensing and certification of SUD treatment professionals is guided by the association's long standing requirement for high educational and training standards for SUD treatment professionals in California. CAADPE believes that rigorous standards for licensing and certification of SUD treatment professionals are necessary to ensure effective and ethical service to the public.

As CAADPE members are the major employers of SUD treatment professionals in California, they are in an important position to help achieve effective treatment outcomes and must hire individuals who possess the appropriate qualifications and competency levels to adequately perform the job requirements. Consumer health and safety in all SUD treatment settings is of primary concern. In addition, quality education and training coupled with appropriate standards of practice can minimize fraud and client abuse.

CAADPE's general principles regarding SUD professional licensing and certification are:

There should be one statewide set of standards for practice, ethics, and professional behavior for individuals licensed or certified as SUD professionals. This includes all SUD treatment settings anywhere in the state of California – private, public, for profit, and not-for-profit sectors – including the state and county correctional systems.

The counselor certification and therapist license should include an authorization to work in any state certified/licensed facility, including but not limited to private licensed acute psychiatric, chemical dependency and general acute hospitals, community care and appropriate licensed mental health facilities, and CDCR in-custody treatment programs.

There must be complete separation between educational entities which train and prepare SUD counselors for licensing and certification and the state organization with authority to carry out the functions of licensing and certification. Consistent with its mandate to protect public safety, the functions of the state authority are to set the standards, test, certify, license, perform background checks, investigate complaints, conduct disciplinary hearings and revoke licenses. The state should have sole authority to license, certify, discipline, fine, and revoke licenses or certifications to treat those with SUD. This separation of training and licensing functions is consistent with the standards and practices of all other licensed or certified individuals of the healing arts.

A variety of avenues must be available to assure that individuals from other states and other areas of expertise can enter the SUD treatment field to help meet its workforce needs. Individuals seeking certification or licensing are responsible for

obtaining the appropriate skills, knowledge and abilities to meet the state's requirements. They should be able to accomplish this through a variety of methods that include out of state study, professional training in other disciplines, study and training through state educational and/or private educational institutions /organizations (e.g. for profit and non-profit)

The scope of practice for each certified counselor and licensed therapists should be based on academic achievement, continuing education, training, and supervised work experience

CAADPE believes that the following principles should guide the development of basic standards for any professional certification program for SUD counselors.

1. Fulfill the mandates of the federal health care reform and parity laws in order to assure a workforce with qualifications and training sufficient to practice SUD counseling as part of a multi disciplinary treatment team.
2. Maintain practice, knowledge, and skills consistent with the best available science and medical based treatments for working with those seeking help for their SUD. Evolving national standards, best practice and models of education and training must be considered in the establishment of any California laws or regulations pertaining to certification.
3. Preserve, value and recognize the important contribution of SUD counselors that comprise the current work force.
4. Ensure that students are taught a curriculum that includes instruction and skill development with evidence- based practices, for the purpose of developing core skills such as interviewing, assessment, active listening, individual counseling, communication styles, group leadership, family dynamics, conflict resolution and other interactive competencies (12 core counseling competencies).
5. Verification that any grandparenting is time limited (e.g. 1 year with subsequent sunset)

CAADPE believes that the following principles, in addition to the above, should guide the development of basic standards for any licensed therapist for SUD.

1. A Master's degree in Healing Arts.
2. Supervised work experience and an appropriate licensing exam.
3. Standards that provide for Clinical Supervision as a master's level function,

The recent establishment of a National Commission for Accreditation of Addiction Studies Programs in Higher Education suggests a national trend toward standardized addiction education and advanced degree level counselor certification and licensure. Requiring higher educational degrees for practitioners who treat SUD is based on the science and neurological basis of SUD and relapse, the development of medication-assisted therapies, and the frequent presence of co-occurring disorders in those who have been diagnosed with SUD related problems. Similar professions which train practitioners to treat psychological and physiological problems have long required that those practitioners obtain advanced degrees in their respective disciplines. CAADPE supports this tradition, while recognizing the value of a professionally supervised therapeutic team that includes counselors and others with a range of experience and training.