

A Call to Action: Voice your Support for the New Veterans Health Administration Regulations Requiring Graduation from CACREP Programs!

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently released qualification standards that formally recognize licensed professional counselors who have graduated from CACREP accredited programs as mental health specialists within the Veterans Health Administration. The full text of the standards is available online at

http://www1.va.gov/vapubs/viewPublication.asp?Pub_ID=507&FType=2

Of key interest to CACREP programs is the educational qualification outlined in the regulations, which requires counselors to hold a master's degree in mental health counseling, or a related field, from a program accredited by the Council on Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Examples of related mental health counseling fields include, but are not limited to, Addiction Counseling; Community Counseling; Gerontology Counseling; Marital, Couple, and Family Counseling; and Marriage and Family Therapy. There are no substitute degrees authorized.

This is a momentous development for all members of the counseling profession and one that should be celebrated. From this week forward, appropriately educated counselors who can also obtain licenses for independent practice as counselors will be eligible for VA positions as outlined in the regulations. Last week this was not possible.

Many thanks are owed to NBCC, AMHCA, and ACA who have lobbied for the recognition of counselors by the VA and other federal agencies over a period of years. Although CACREP, as an independent nonprofit organization, does not engage in formal lobbying, we can and do respond to information requests from interested parties such as the VA. What emerges from the federal government's inclusion of CACREP is the importance placed upon there being a nationally uniform set of high quality educational standards to ensure the preparation of highly qualified practitioners. As faculty and students in a CACREP program, you have been an important part of this recognition, due to your investment in seeking and maintaining CACREP accredited status.

While this is a major turning point for the counseling profession, we must alert you to the fact that there is not agreement among the organizations involved in the lobbying efforts that CACREP should have been written into the regulations. ACA has indicated that they would like to change the requirement that counselors must graduate from a CACREP program to one that is less restrictive and more inclusive. This approach will unfortunately dilute the value of the choice your program and students have made to seek and maintain CACREP accreditation and could potentially undermine this important recognition for counselors. In fact, it is likely that the VA would not have recognized counselors as providers at all without the requirement that they be graduates of a CACREP accredited program. To ensure that the quality assurance that CACREP provides remains part of the VA's regulations, we strongly encourage CACREP faculty, students, and graduates to contact ACA, NBCC, and AMHCA and tell them to support the VA regulations as written.

Send your emails supporting the requirement for graduation from a CACREP program to:

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advocacy@nbcc.org