



CRCC Connections News Brief

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For Immediate Release
Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification
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ARCA/CORE/CRCC/NRCA Call to Action

The issue:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has issued qualification standards formally recognizing certain licensed professional counselors as mental health specialists within the Veterans Health Administration. The standards are now [available online](#).

Presently, the regulations require licensed professional counselors to have 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). According to the release, 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.

Although this is a positive step forward for the counseling profession, and an important means of increasing the pool of mental health service providers available to meet the large unmet needs of our nation's veterans, the current standards exclude rehabilitation counselors who are also licensed professional counselors but who did not graduate from a CACREP-accredited counseling program. We believe strongly that this narrow definition is not in the best interest of VA consumers - particularly veterans with disabilities.

According to a press release issued by the American Counseling Association (ACA), it will still take some time for the counseling positions to be posted on <http://usajobs.gov> or <http://www.vacareers.va.gov>, and for counselors to be appropriately recognized within the VA health care system. During that time, the VA will be working on implementation of the new position descriptions and their use by VA facilities. ARCA, CORE, CRCC, and NRCA are working together and alongside ACA and others to continue to advocate for more inclusive language. In these efforts, we will recommend specific modifications to the current standards, and monitor their implementation to ensure that rehabilitation counselors are adequately recognized for-and hired into-mental health specialist positions within the VA.

To provide context for this, it may be helpful to know that ARCA, CORE, CRCC, and NRCA have all been active in advocating for inclusion of rehabilitation counselors in counselor licensure laws around the country; CRCC is taking the lead in continuing those efforts. However, inclusion in licensure is NOT sufficient unless all licensed counselors are able to practice in the areas for which they are qualified. Prior to the VA issuing these exclusionary standards, an Institute of Medicine panel recommended to Congress that veterans be able to self-refer to a licensed counselor as with other mental health professionals like social work and psychology. However, in making this change, the IOM recommended that only graduates of CACREP-accredited mental health programs be reimbursed through TRICARE. This excludes the vast majority of licensed professional counselors, including those who are graduates of CORE-accredited programs, from providing direct services to countless veterans and their families, many of whom are currently providing those services currently. Without advocacy, people with disabilities (including a growing number of veterans) may not be able to receive services from counselors who have disability expertise.

Action needed:

The VA changes entail both a challenge and an opportunity for rehabilitation counselors and require comprehensive and unified involvement on the part of everyone in the profession. At this point in the advocacy process, we need to understand and be able to articulate the kinds of issues and concerns faced by rehabilitation counselors whose graduate education does not meet the new VA standards. We are particularly interested in experiences and concerns you have in seeking positions within the VA under the new standards. Please provide your input by going to <http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/WEB22BBRWFJ9EN>.

You will hear from us again because this is going to require involvement by the whole profession. Stay tuned for additional updates as ARCA, CORE, CRCC, and NRCA continue advocacy efforts on this and other important advocacy initiatives that impact the recognition of rehabilitation counselors.

Thank you for your help!

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Executive Director
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