



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Olympia, Washington 98504

**NOTICE OF ADOPTION OF A
POLICY STATEMENT**

Title of Policy Statement: Applying for New Agency Affiliated Counselor Credentials |
Policy Number: AAC-23-01

Issuing Entity: Department of Health

Subject Matter: Clarifying the Department of Health's position on implementation of
new agency affiliated counselor credentials.

Effective Date: July 23, 2023

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Department of Health
Health Systems Quality Assurance

Policy Statement

<i>Title:</i>	Applying for New Agency Affiliated Counselor Credentials.	<i>Number:</i> AAC-23-01
<i>References:</i>	Second Substitute House Bill 1724 (chapter 425, Laws of 2023) Chapter 18.130 RCW , RCW 18.19.020 , RCW 18.19.050 Chapter 246-810 WAC , WAC 246-810-011	
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<i>Approved By:</i>	Christie Spice, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy	

It is the Department of Health’s (department) position that a registered Agency Affiliated Counselor (AAC) may immediately apply for an AAC certification or AAC license under [Second Substitute House Bill \(2SHB\) 1724](#), passed during the 2023 legislative session, in accordance with this policy statement.

2SHB 1724 amended [RCW 18.19.020](#) and [RCW 18.19.090](#) to create two new AAC credentials, the AAC certification (“Certified AAC”) and the AAC license (“Licensed AAC”). Because the bill was effective immediately, the department filed [WSR 23-16-031](#) on July 21, 2023 to establish standards related to these professions by emergency rule. The permanent rule making process will begin in late 2023. The credentials have been available since July 24, 2023.

The new AAC credentials provide different scopes of practice based on the individual’s level of education and experience:

- Registered AAC: The Registered AAC credential has no specific education or experience requirements. The scope of practice for this credential is limited to counseling as defined under RCW 18.19.020 and could include student interns, juvenile rehabilitation counselors, and peer counselors.
- Certified AAC: The Certified AAC credential requires a bachelor’s degree and five years of supervised experience. The scope of practice, which has no previous equivalent, includes counseling as defined under RCW 18.19.020 and the ability to make provisional assessments and diagnoses, which must be reviewed by a clinical supervisor who is able to independently provide mental health assessments and diagnoses.
- Licensed AAC: The Licensed AAC credential requires a master’s degree and two years of supervised experience. The scope of practice includes counseling as defined under RCW 18.19.020 and the ability to independently conduct assessments and make diagnoses. The Licensed AAC is the equivalent of, and will replace, the Registered AAC designated as a Mental Health Professional (MHP) under chapter 71.05 RCW.

The department is fully implementing these new credentials over the next year to create a smooth transition and minimize the impact on providers and behavioral health agencies. There are 3 options for current AACs:

1. Keep the Registered AAC. An individual can remain a Registered AAC if they do not meet requirements for the new AAC credentials or if their job duties do not require them to assess or diagnose.
2. Apply for one of the new credentials now. An individual can apply for a new credential; however, they will need to pay the initial application fee now and the renewal fee later in 2024.
3. Wait for the current AAC Registration to expire. A Registered AAC designated as an MHP prior to July 24, 2023, can wait to apply for the new Licensed AAC credential until their current registration is up for renewal in 2024. Between now and their next renewal, they can continue to practice as an MHP under this policy statement.

This extended implementation timeframe will allow persons currently registered as AACs time to apply for an appropriate credential based on the provider's level of experience and education. In addition, this will allow the department to avoid charging some applicants an additional credential fee in the same one-year period and prevent potential disruptions to the behavioral health agency workforce.

Application Process and Timeframes for New AAC Credentials:

- Application materials for the Certified AAC and Licensed AAC credentials are available on the Department of Health website.
- A current Registered AAC with a bachelor's degree and five years of supervised experience may qualify for the AAC certification. A Registered AAC must apply for the AAC certification before they can work with the expanded scope of practice because there is currently no equivalent designation.
- A current Registered AAC who was already designated as an MHP prior to July 24, 2023, may continue practicing and serving as an MHP under their current credential until the next time their credential needs to be renewed. Before their current credential expires, the AAC must apply for the new AAC license in order to continue practicing as an MHP.
- The Department of Health does not intend to pursue actions against any Registered AAC for acting as an MHP, providing assessment and diagnosis services in accordance with this policy statement, during this grace period.
- After January 1, 2025, all AACs will have had an opportunity to apply for the new AAC license and all AACs must comply with their credential's scope of practice. An individual practicing outside their scope of practice may be subject to disciplinary action.

In conclusion, it is the department's position that a Registered AAC may apply for an AAC certification or license in accordance with this policy statement. This policy statement will remain in effect until January 1, 2025, to allow additional time for current AACs to apply for a new credential or renew their current registration as appropriate. This policy statement will be rescinded on January 1, 2025, and afterwards all AACs must be credentialed and practice within the limits established by chapter [18.19 RCW](#) and chapter [246-810 WAC](#).

This statement represents the policy position of the department. Other regulatory or legal entities may have a different interpretation of the law or requirements.