

# Mental Health & Substance Abuse Counselors

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## Definition

A Mental Health Counselor is a professional who help people who have normal cognitive processes cope with difficult life events such as a physical illness, death, and divorce. Others help people manage serious mental illnesses like bipolar disorder. A Substance Abuse Counselor advises people who suffer from alcoholism, drug addiction, eating disorders, or other behavioral problems.

## What LB 344 does

This legislation streamlines the licensure process for Mental Health and Substance Use Treatment Centers from two separate licenses to one. In many cases across Nebraska, Mental Health Centers and Substance Abuse Treatment Centers are combined into one facility so they can provide multiple services to their clientele in one location. The current law treats these facilities as separate entities, causing them both to pay fees and be licensed separately. This legislation does not require these services to be combined. If a medical provider wishes to only provide mental health services or only substance abuse treatment, then they will be allowed to do so.

Because these two services are currently licensed separately, this legislation will also remove some unnecessary regulations, such as removing outpatient services from being licensed as a separate treatment center. It will also remove a licensure fee. Under current law, centers pay a licensure fee for both the mental health and substance abuse services. This legislation removes the duplicative licensure fee.

Under current law, if a licensed counselor were to move to Nebraska from another state, they would not be allowed to apply for a Nebraska license until they were employed. This legislation will allow an applicant to obtain a provisional license and then seek employment. This will help with reciprocity and mobility of counselors from state to state.

## State Specific Information

All states license the mental health counseling profession and require mental health and substance abuse counselors to have a master's degree level of education. Many states expect all professional counselors, regardless of specialty, to take the National Counselor Examination, administered by the National Board for Certified Counselors. State licensing is a separate process from national credentialing, even when the same tests are required. Some states group mental health counselors with other professional counselors. Others have multiple licensing levels for counselors and recognize unique qualifications.

In 2015 there were 1,047 substance abuse counselors with active licenses in Nebraska. In the same year, there were 3,681 mental health counselors with active licenses in Nebraska.

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