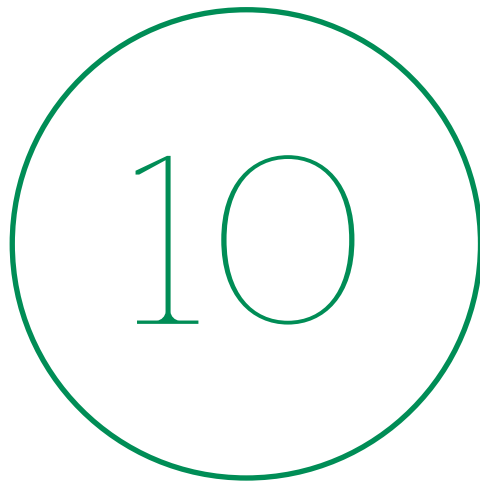


**GETTING STARTED AS A
MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR
IN MASSACHUSETTS**



Questions About
Launching Your
Career, Answered

10 MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Click or scroll to find the answers

- 1 What education and experience do I need to become a licensed counselor in Massachusetts?
- 2 How long does it take to earn 60 graduate-level credits?
Will I be able to work full time while going to school?
- 3 From the day I start my master's degree program, how long will it be before I'm eligible to get my LMHC License?
- 4 Do I need a doctorate degree (PhD) to have a private practice in Massachusetts?
- 5 What types of organizations employ LMHCs?
What jobs do they perform?
- 6 What's the difference between a School Adjustment Counselor and a School Counselor?
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- 8 What's the average salary for a counselor?
- 9 What's the difference between an LMHC and LICSW?
- 10 If I earn my LMHC License in Massachusetts, can I practice in another state?

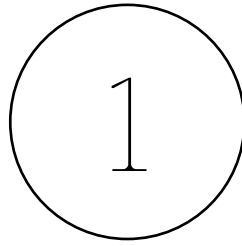
You want to help people improve their lives, and you're looking to apply your compassion to a career that promotes wellness. You think you have what it takes to become a great counselor, but you're not sure where to start.

That's where we come in. We've compiled answers to the 10 most frequently asked questions about launching a career in mental health counseling. Find helpful information about everything from choosing a graduate program to earning your license to practice in Massachusetts. You'll be on the right path in no time.



EDUCATION

Ok, so first things first:
You need the
right education.



What education and experience do I need to become a licensed counselor in Massachusetts?

A: YOUR PATH TO BECOMING A LICENSED COUNSELOR DEPENDS ON THE FIELD YOU PLAN TO WORK IN:

STEPS FOR LICENSED MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS (LMHC) ---

1. Get your bachelor's degree.

Your degree might not need to be in counseling or a related field, depending on the graduate school you plan to attend.

2. Earn your master's degree.

Choose a 60-credit, regionally accredited program in mental health counseling or a related field, as determined by the state licensure board.

Related Areas of Study

Adjustment Counseling / Clinical Psychology /
Counseling & Psychology / Counselor Education /
Expressive Therapies / Rehabilitation Counseling

Required Field Experience

In Massachusetts, your graduate program has to include a minimum 100-hour practicum and a 600-hour internship providing mental health counseling in a clinical or school setting. Some schools require more hours than the state requirement.

3. Work under the supervision of a licensed clinician.

After graduation, you can work as a Master's Level Clinician under the direct supervision of a licensed clinician who meets the state's definition of an approved supervisor.

You'll need to accrue 3,360 hours of supervised field experience in the mental health counseling field (approximately two years of full-time work). You have eight years from the time you graduate to meet this requirement.

4. Pass the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Exam.

You'll need to pass the exam before you can apply for the LMHC License through the state.

5. Apply for the LMHC License through the Massachusetts Board of Registration of Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professions.

STEPS FOR SCHOOL COUNSELORS & SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT COUNSELORS

You'll need to get an Initial License through the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). This is a separate licensing board than the one you'd go through for an LMHC License.

1. Get your bachelor's degree.

Your degree might not need to be in counseling or a related field, depending on the graduate school you plan to attend.

2. Get your master's degree.

Choose a regionally accredited program that has been approved by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). The program must meet the state's Subject Matter Knowledge Requirements.

School Counselor

(Previously known as "School Guidance Counselor")

The master's degree program must be in counseling. If you are not planning to get your LMHC License in addition to your Initial School Counselor License, you can choose a 48-credit master's degree program. Your program has to include a 450-hour practicum in an educational setting.

If you are planning to get your LMHC License, you'll need to enroll in a 60-credit graduate program that requires more practicum and internship hours.

School Adjustment Counselor

You'll need to enroll in a 60-credit master's degree program in counseling or social work.

Your graduate program has to include 900 practicum hours for this field, with 450 of the hours in an educational setting working with children, adolescents, or families.

3. Pass the Communications & Literacy sections of the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL).

4. Apply for your Initial License.

You'll do this through the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). You can apply for your license as soon as you graduate from a DESE approved master's program.

5. Move your Initial License to a Professional License.

With an Initial License, you can work as a counselor for five years. To move your Initial License to a Professional License, first, you'll need to work in a school setting for three years.

School Counselor

(Previously known as "School Guidance Counselor")

Two options to advance to a professional license:

1. Accumulate 60 semester hours of graduate courses related to the license you seek. These 60 credits may include credits you've earned in your master's program for your Initial License.

or

2. Be certified by the National Board of Certified Counselors or the National Board for School Counseling.

School Adjustment Counselor

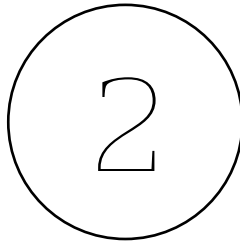
Advance to a Professional License in one of these ways:

1. Accumulate 60 semester hours of graduate courses in a discipline related to the license you seek. These 60 credits may include credits you've already earned in your master's degree program for your Initial School Counselor License.

or

2. Achieve and maintain certification or licensure for one of the following:

Licensed Mental Health Counseling (LMHC) / Licensed Certified Social Worker (LCSW) / Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) / Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) / Licensed Rehabilitation Counselor (LRC)



How long does it take to earn
60 graduate-level credits?
Will I be able to work full time
while going to school?

**A: IT TAKES THREE YEARS OF FULL-TIME
STUDY, INCLUDING SOME WORK IN THE
SUMMER, TO EARN 60 GRADUATE CREDITS.**

It takes a little longer if you're studying part time. The 60 credits include all courses, practicums, and internships. When researching graduate programs, see if the school offers courses delivered in flexible formats, such as online or weekend intensives. This flexibility could make it easier to balance school, work, and other commitments.

All master's programs in counseling in Massachusetts do require a minimum of internship hours. Most internships require 21-25 hours of work a week. Many sites require daytime hours, Monday — Friday.

3

From the day I start my master's degree program, how long will it be before I'm eligible to get my LMHC License?

A: QUICK ANSWER: YOU'LL BE QUALIFIED TO APPLY FOR YOUR LICENSE AFTER APPROXIMATELY FIVE YEARS. HERE'S THE BREAKDOWN:



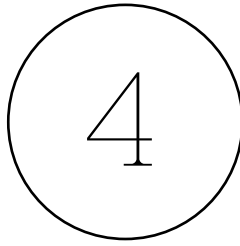
3 years of attending graduate school full time



2 years of working full time under supervision to accrue 3,360 post-master's hours



8 years The maximum amount of time you have to complete your post-master's requirements



Do I need a doctorate degree (PhD) to have a private practice in Massachusetts?

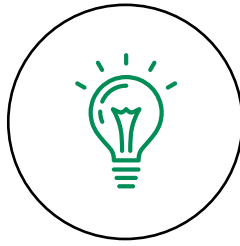
A: NO, A PHD IS NOT REQUIRED.

You can start a private counseling practice in Massachusetts once you've received your official LMHC License from the state.

Insider Tip —————
What advice would you give to a new counselor?

“ Be flexible. Keep an open mind. Pay attention to details. Remember personal growth can be uncomfortable. ”

Tom Sprague | Psychotherapist, MA



CAREERS

Let's talk about your
career prospects.
*(Because they look
pretty good from here.)*

5

What types of organizations employ LMHCs? What jobs do they perform?

A: LMHCs CAN WORK IN A VARIETY OF SETTINGS, FROM SCHOOLS AND CLINICS TO COMMUNITY AGENCIES.

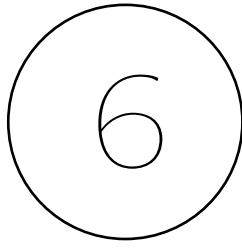
Depending on your interests and focus in graduate school, your title could be anything from Academic Counselor to Psychotherapist. Take a look:

Where You Might Work

- College Counseling Centers
- Community Agencies
- Corrections Facilities
- Hospitals and Partial Hospitalization Programs (*Comprehensive, Short-Term, and Intensive Clinical Treatment Programs*)
- Nonprofit Agencies
- Outpatient Mental Health Centers
- Residential Treatment Facilities
- Schools
- Shelters (*Domestic Violence Shelters and Homeless Shelters*)
- Substance Abuse Clinics
- Therapeutic Schools

What You Might Be Called

- Academic Counselor
- Bereavement Counselor
- Career Services Coordinator
- Drug and Alcohol Counselor
- Early Childhood Clinician
- In-Home Therapist
- Outpatient Clinician
- Outreach Therapist
- Psychotherapist
- School Adjustment Counselor (*Also called School Social Worker*)
- School Counselor
- School-Based Clinician



What's the difference between a School Adjustment Counselor and a School Counselor?

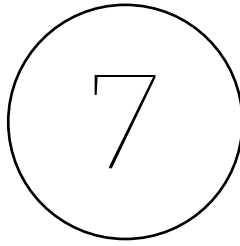
A:

SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT COUNSELORS

Address the mental health needs of students within a school. Sometimes the position is called a School Social Worker. They can meet one-on-one with at-risk students, or with groups of students.

SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Focus on addressing academic, social and emotional, and career needs of students. In the past, this role was more frequently called *School Guidance Counselor*. This is a dedicated position in a school. At the high school level, School Counselors help students prepare for post-secondary education. A person can become a School Counselor after completing a 48-credit graduate program, but they won't be eligible for an LMHC License unless they complete a 60-credit graduate program.



What's the job market like for LMHCs? Is there a demand?

A: THIS IS A GREAT TIME TO LAUNCH YOUR CAREER IN MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, job prospects are projected to grow by up to 25%, depending on the specific field. This is much faster than the national average for other occupations, which is 4%.

This spike in demand is being chalked up to a growing number of individuals in need of counseling services, as well as increased access to health insurance and covered preventative treatments.

12-25% projected growth in employment, 2019-2029

(1) SUBSTANCE ABUSE, BEHAVIORAL DISORDER, AND MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS

NUMBER OF JOBS NATIONWIDE 2019:
319,400

JOB OUTLOOK (2019-2029):
25% projected growth

And of all 50 states, Massachusetts has the 3rd highest employment level in this occupation, with 16,120 people working in these roles.

(2) CHILD, FAMILY, AND SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS*

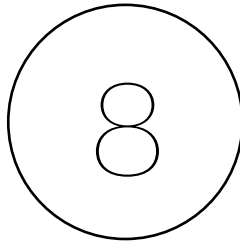
NUMBER OF JOBS NATIONWIDE (2019):
342,500

JOB OUTLOOK (2019-2029):
12% projected growth (for all social workers)

*In Massachusetts, School Social Workers are often referred to as School Adjustment Counselors.

(1) **SOURCE:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/substance-abuse-behavioral-disorder-and-mental-health-counselors.htm> (September 28, 2020).

(2) **SOURCE:** Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Social Workers, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/social-workers.htm> (November 04, 2020).

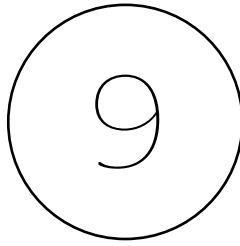


What's the average salary for a counselor?

A: MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS CAN EXPECT TO EARN A MEDIAN NATIONAL WAGE OF \$46,240.

(According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of May 2019)

What does that mean, exactly? Generally speaking, it means that half of mental health counselors in the field earn less than the median wage and the other half earn more. And, the highest 10 percent of practicing mental health counselors earn more than \$76,080 (1). You can expect these figures to vary from state to state in accordance with the cost of living.



What's the difference between an LMHC and LICSW?

The following answer assumes that you'll be earning your license and working in the state of Massachusetts. There are comparable licenses in other states. Check your own state's licensing board.

A:

LICENSED MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR (LMHC)

LMHCs predominantly focus on talk therapy with individuals, groups, couples, or families, and attend to the development of the clinical relationship between the client and counselor. They focus on the individual person and internal psychological dimensions, encouraging their clients to explore how their inner world might be affecting their experiences in the outer world. (Inside > Outside)

Master's degree programs that prepare students for the LMHC License often include courses on:

Psychopathology / Developmental Psychology /
Counseling Theories & Practice / Career Counseling /
Psychology of Culture / Group Counseling & Dynamics
/ Ethics & Professional Standards / Research Methods /
Substance Abuse Assessment & Counseling

LMHCs are equipped to help people overcome challenges to become their best selves, treat individuals with mental disorders, or assist people who are dealing with trauma or substance abuse, among other areas. LMHCs are qualified to provide counseling services independently as a self-employed person in a private practice. And, LMHCs are qualified for many of the same jobs as LICSWs.

LICENSED INDEPENDENT CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER (LICSW)

In Massachusetts, there are a few tiers of social work licensing, each requiring different levels of education and field experience. The LICSW License — the highest tier — qualifies an individual to provide counseling services independently as a self-employed person in a private practice.

While both LMHCs and LICSWs can provide psychotherapy, their approaches tend to be different. Social workers are trained to examine how the outside world (policies and systems) impacts an individual's or family's inside world. (Outside > Inside)

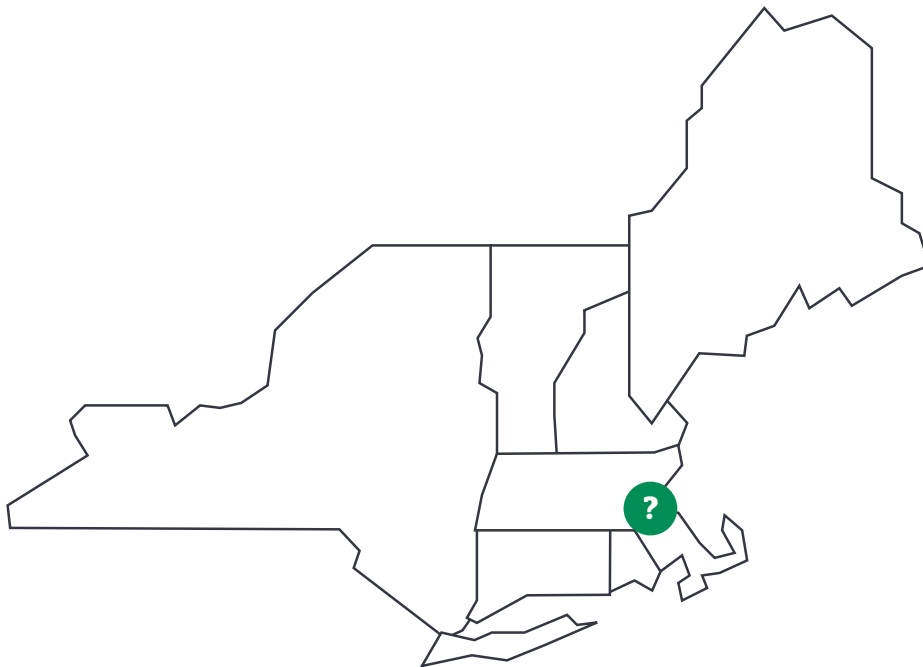
To become an LICSW, you must earn a master's (or doctoral) degree in social work from an accredited program, become an LCSW (Licensed Certified Social Worker) first, then accumulate additional hours of clinical experience (among other requirements). An LICSW's course of study focuses on social welfare and policy, how political and economic forces impact individuals, and case management.

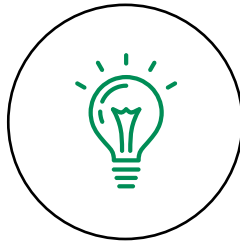
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If I earn my LMHC License
in Massachusetts, can I
practice in another state?

A: MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING LICENSURE IS STATE BASED.

There is no license portability between states. If you want to practice outside of Massachusetts, you'll need to apply for licensure in that state. Check with that state's licensure board to make sure that Massachusetts' standards are equivalent or higher. Many states are similar to Massachusetts in terms of requirements, while others differ significantly.





CONGRATS!

You now know more about how to become a practicing mental health counselor than anyone else in the room. *We hope this information motivates you to take the next step in launching your career.*

Get started by learning more about mental health counseling programs at

[LESLEY.EDU/COUNSELING](https://lesley.edu/counseling)

CONTACT US

Have we missed any questions you have about starting your career in mental health counseling?

Send your questions to *luadmissions@lesley.edu*.

