

TRICARE CERTIFIED MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS CREDENTIALING

NBCC is pleased to inform NCCs that TRICARE has begun credentialing counselors for independent practice. Though the interim final rule (IFR) establishing qualifications for counselor independent practice was effective upon its release on December 27, 2011, credentialing could not begin until the regional contractors developed corresponding procedures and documentation.

TRICARE is the health care program serving uniformed service members, retirees and their families.

Counselors interested in becoming TRICARE certified mental health counselors (TCMHCs) should note that the transition period for obtaining the TCMHC ends on December 31, 2014. NBCC encourages NCCs interested in becoming credentialed to review the criteria to determine eligibility.

A distinct TCMHC application is now available for each of the three TRICARE regions:

- TRICARE North <https://www.hnfs.com/content/hnfs/home/tn/prov.html>
- TRICARE South <http://www.humana-military.com/south/provider/provider.asp>
- TRIWest <http://www.triwest.com/en/provider/resource-library/forms/Mental%20Health%20Practitioner.pdf>

Any questions regarding the application, credentialing process or TCMHC requirements should be directed to the appropriate TRICARE regional contractor.

Until this interim final rule was adopted, counselors were required to obtain physician referral and supervision when serving TRICARE beneficiaries, a requirement not placed on other mental health professions. NBCC, in coalition with the American Counseling Association and American Mental Health Counselors Association, advocated for legislation to remove those restrictions and allow for independent practice. The effort encompassed several bills and two federally mandated studies. Finally, the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2011 directed the Department of Defense (DoD) to establish requirements for **counselor independent practice**.

During an open comment period for the IFR, NBCC submitted suggestions for improving the criteria. It is expected that the DoD will issue a final rule with some modifications to the requirements, but the IFR criteria will be in force until such rules are adopted.

NBCC is pleased that counselors are able to serve TRICARE beneficiaries without the overly restrictive requirements of physician referral and supervision.

More information on this issue can be found on NBCC's Web site at <http://www.nbcc.org/TRICARE/>.

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