

The Counseling Compact and Professional Identity

The Counseling Compact is an interstate licensure compact designed to foster interstate licensure portability, increase access to services, and enhance public protection for the counseling profession and its clients. The Counseling Compact is built on the uniform standards that currently exist among states and the trust that individual state licensing regulation provides for competent and ethical care.

Matters of professional identity, a topic of particular relevance for the counseling profession, are reserved for states to address through initial licensure laws and in the education and training of counselors. This resource is intended to clarify the purpose of the Counseling Compact and address potential misunderstandings that might exist between those advocating specifically for professional identity policies.

The Compact Commission Key Points

- The Counseling Compact legislation reflects the reality and uniformity of how states license counselors.
- Licensing is solely the purview of states, which have the total authority to determine the criteria for granting a license to anyone.
- Compacts address interstate practice issues and are not intended to address professional identity issues.
- The Counseling Compact Commission may only issue rules that are rooted in authority granted by the compact. The narrow rulemaking authority of a compact commission only applies to the implementation and administration of the compact terms.

The Purpose of the Counseling Compact

The Counseling Compact operates as a binding agreement between all member states who have agreed to the same legislation of the model compact. The compact legislation reflects the current reality and uniformity of how states license counselors. The legislation was purposely drafted to be broad enough to include as many states as possible while adhering to the standards established for participation.

Licensing is solely the purview of states, which have the total authority to determine the criteria for granting a license to anyone. Every state that participates in the Counseling Compact agrees to recognize that every other state has done their due diligence and has not granted an independent license to anyone who should not be licensed. Compacts address interstate practice issues, and no existing occupational licensure compacts address matters of professional identity. Compacts merely reflect the licensing practices of states.

Professional Standards of the Counseling Compact

The Counseling Compact establishes uniform standards for both states and counselors wishing to join the compact. The uniform standards were formed after an extensive stakeholder-lead process, which included counseling regulators, professional associations, and practitioners and was supported by compact policy and legal experts.

The uniform standards include, but are not limited to:

- A definition of licensed professional counselor was drafted to specifically allow for inclusivity of more counselors, specifically those without the formal title of licensed professional counselor but who still meet the uniform entry requirements. For example, some states may use licensed clinical professional counselor or licensed mental health counselor as licensure titles. For the purposes of the compact, a licensed professional counselor means a counselor licensed by a state participating in the compact, regardless of the title used by that state, to independently assess, diagnose, and treat behavioral health conditions.
- States must require licensees to pass a nationally recognized exam approved by the interstate compact commission to be eligible for the compact.
 - The state requirement includes the few states that allow professionals who graduate from closely related programs to be licensed under a title that meets the compact definitions of a licensed professional counselor.
 - A primary consideration by the compact commission will be to name an exam that reflects the present reality of state required testing and not to exclude any current or potential member states. The naming of the exam was intentionally designated for the compact commission, and not named in legislation, to account for future state regulatory changes.
- States must require licensees to have a master's degree in counseling with 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours. Licensees may also qualify with 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours of graduate course work in the following topic areas:
 - Professional Counseling Orientation and Ethical Practice
 - Social and Cultural Diversity
 - Human Growth and Development
 - Career Development
 - Counseling and Helping Relationships
 - Group Counseling and Group Work
 - Diagnosis and Treatment
 - Assessment and Testing
 - Research and Program Evaluation
 - Other areas as determined by the Commission
- *The model legislation and a section-by-section summary may be found at [counselingcompact.org](https://www.counselingcompact.org).*

The Counseling Compact Administration

The Counseling Compact Commission was established in the compact legislation to oversee and administer the compact. The commission is comprised and controlled by the member states of the counseling compact via delegates, or commissioners, from each state as defined by the compact (one delegate per state who is either a licensing board member or administrator). The Counseling Compact reached its 10 state activation threshold in 2022, initiating the formation and convening of the commission.

The Counseling Compact Commission may not exceed the authority granted to it by the actual compact legislation. Rules must be rooted in authority granted by the compact. The narrow rulemaking authority of a compact commission only applies to the implementation and administration of the compact terms (i.e., the interstate licensure process created by the compact). Any substantive changes to the compact legislation would necessitate every state that has enacted the legislation to go back and reenact revised legislation.

All compact commission meetings are open to the public. Meeting agendas, minutes, and proposed and final rulemaking are made public in accordance with the compact legislation and commission bylaws.