

Community and Social Services

Mental Health Counselors

Mental Health Counselors work with individuals, families, or particular communities or populations, in order to treat emotional and mental illness and support mental health. The issues mental health counselors commonly treat include: depression, anxiety, addiction and substance abuse, suicidal impulses, stress, trauma, low self-esteem, and grief. Mental health counselors work with clients to address a range of issues related to life skills including: job and career concerns, educational decisions, and relationship problems.

One of the many skills mental health counselors often need involves “cultural competency”, meaning familiarity with and sensitivity to the context, norms, and needs of the communities they work with. In some instances, this may involve speaking a language other than English, or possessing awareness of family, religious, or cultural norms and traditions.

In addition, mental health counselors may be involved in community outreach, advocacy, and mediation activities. Some specialize in delivering mental health services for the elderly. Mental health counselors often work closely with other mental health specialists, as part of a treatment team, or in collaboration with psychiatrists, psychologists, and other counselors. Depending on the position, mental health counselors may work in schools, community centers, state or local agencies, healthcare facilities, rehabilitation centers, prisons and jails, nursing homes, or across multiple locations.

Although work in this area can be very rewarding, it also can be very emotionally draining. Counselors in this area need to plan for and develop supports for their own stress management and emotional well-being. Their work week is generally a standard 40 hours although longer hours may be required depending on the workplace.

Education/Training

How to Obtain:

Completion of a bachelor’s degree program at an accredited four year university is required. In most states, a Master’s degree in counseling or counseling education is also required.

Most states have some licensing requirements for mental health counselors for particular positions, or for advancement. In New York, requirements include:

- a Masters or higher degree,

- 3000 hours of supervised experience working with clients,
- Passage of the National Clinical Mental Health Counseling Examination (NCMHCE), offered by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC).

More Information on Licensing:

- New York State: <http://www.op.nysed.gov/prof/mhp/mhp-apply-faq.htm>
- National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC): <http://www.nbcc.org/>

Average Costs:

Tuition and fees for a master's degree in the social and behavior sciences, such as a Masters in counseling, costs an average of \$10,900* per year. Completion time is generally 2 years.

Licensing costs vary by state, and can generally go up to \$600.

In New York, the fee for the examination is \$345. There is an additional \$70 application fee to begin supervised hours of experience, before licensing. In all, fees for licensing total \$415, plus the cost of any exam study aids.

*Note: This figure does not include federal, state, or university financial aid resources such as grants, fellowships, scholarships or work study. It also does not include vocational rehabilitation or other state resources available specifically to people with disabilities. The out-of-pocket expense may be significantly less.