

Counsel for counselors: Get new credentials by July 1 or stop practicing

Local News

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OLYMPIA — More than 10,000 counselors may not be able to practice in Washington after June 30. Many people who work as registered counselors haven't taken the necessary steps to stay in practice, and the time for them to act is growing short.

Under state law, all registered counselors must have a new counseling credential or stop practicing on July 1. Legislation enacted in 2008 created eight new counseling professions. The law abolishes the registered counselor credential.

"This law protects patients, which is always our goal," said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. "It ensures people have to meet more rigorous standards if they want counseling credentials. It applies just as much to counselors who have the old credential as it does to new applicants."

Many counselors haven't applied for credentials in one of the new professions. Registered counselors work in many settings and have a broad scope of practice. They work in government and private agencies, including alcohol and substance abuse treatment facilities. Registered counselors may also have private practices, and all of them will have to meet the new standards.

"As of April 12, we received 5,321 out of a possible 12,000 applications," said Assistant Secretary Karen Jensen. "We're concerned that some people practicing as counselors won't get their new credential on time to continue working with their patients and clients. If applications are received after April, there may not be time to review them before the registered counselor credential is abolished."

Applications are processed in the order they arrive. Processing times vary based on the number of applications received and individual circumstances. Counselors should keep that in mind when applying for a new credential. The large number of applications expected may result in delays. Counselors should allow 10 to 12 weeks for processing.

The eight professions that require new credentials are agency-affiliated counselor, certified counselor, certified adviser, chemical dependency professional trainee, mental health counselor associate, marriage and family therapist associate, social work associate advanced, and social work associate independent clinical.

Information about [counseling professions in Washington](#) is available on the Department of Health's Web site.