
Wisconsin Legislative Council

ACT MEMO



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2021 Wisconsin Act 251
[2021 Senate Bill 259]

Genetic Counselors

2021 Wisconsin Act 251 creates regulatory oversight and licensing requirements for genetic counselors, administered by a Genetic Counselors Affiliated Credentialing Board.

LICENSURE AND RENEWAL

To apply for a license as a genetic counselor, a person must meet all of the following educational and competency requirements:

- Have a degree in genetic counseling from an institution that is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Genetic Counseling or the American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics, or from a program outside of the United States that is substantially equivalent.
- Pass an examination administered by the American Board of Genetic Counseling, or pass the genetic counseling examination administered by the American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics.
- Be certified with the American Board of Genetic Counseling.

Temporary License

The board may issue a temporary license, for up to one year, for an applicant who has a degree and certification, but has not yet passed an examination. In the board's discretion, a temporary license may be renewed once.

A person with a temporary license may practice only under the supervision and direction of a genetic counselor or physician.

Out-of-State License

The board may waive the educational and competency requirements for an applicant who holds a license from another state, territory, or country that has substantially equivalent licensing requirements.

A person who is licensed in another state or meets other certification requirements is not required to have a license if only providing consulting services in this state on a temporary basis. The person must notify the board and receive the board's authorization to provide the consulting services.

Grandfathering Based on Previous Experience

The board may waive the educational and competency requirements for an applicant who meets all of the following requirements:

- Has at least 10 years of documented work experience practicing genetic counseling.
- Has completed at least 25 hours of continuing education within the previous five years approved by the National Society of Genetic Counselors.
- Submits a letter of recommendation from a physician and a letter of recommendation from a genetic counselor.

To be considered, an application based on previous experience must be submitted to the board by September 1, 2023.

Renewal

A genetic counselor must renew the license every two years and must complete at least 30 hours of continuing education requirements in each two-year renewal period. A person must also maintain certification, or, if necessary, achieve recertification, with the American Board of Genetic Counseling.

PRACTICE

The act defines the practice of “genetic counseling” as any of the following:

- Obtaining and evaluating individual, family, and medical histories to determine genetic risk for genetic or medical conditions and diseases in a patient, a patient’s offspring, and other family members.
- Discussing the features, natural history, means of diagnosis, genetic and environmental factors, and management of risk, for genetic or medical conditions and diseases.
- Identifying, coordinating, and ordering genetic laboratory tests, as appropriate for a genetic assessment.
- Integrating genetic laboratory test results with personal and family medical history to assess and communicate risk factors for genetic or medical conditions and diseases.
- Explaining the clinical implications of genetic laboratory tests and other diagnostic studies and their results.
- Evaluating a patient’s or family’s responses to the condition or risk of recurrence and providing patient-centered counseling and anticipatory guidance.
- Providing written documentation of medical, genetic, and counseling information for families and health care professionals.

A genetic counselor is prohibited from encouraging an expectant parent to obtain an elective abortion.

CREDENTIALING BOARD

The Genetic Counselors Affiliated Credentialing Board is attached to the Medical Examining Board. The board membership includes four genetic counselors, a physician who is a clinical geneticist, a second physician, and one public member.¹

The board must adopt, by rule, the National Society of Genetic Counselors' code of ethics to govern the professional conduct of genetic counselors. The board must also establish criteria, by rule, for approving continuing education programs and courses required for renewal of the license.

Effective date: The creation of the board was authorized as of April 10, 2022. Licensure requirements begin May 1, 2023.

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¹ For the initial terms of appointment, one genetic counselor and a physician who is a clinical geneticist will be appointed for terms expiring on July 1, 2023, one genetic counselor and the second physician for terms expiring on July 1, 2024, and two genetic counselors and the public member for terms expiring on July 1, 2025.