

Increase Counselor Reimbursement in Medicare Rates



We Are NBCC:

The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to advancing access to Counseling and mental health resources worldwide through Counselor certification, assessment, advocacy, and capacity building. NBCC established and administers the national certification system for Professional Counselors, ensuring that National Certified Counselors meet the established standards of practice through **Education, Examination, Supervision, and Ethical Guidelines**. Through our affiliate, the Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE), the organization also administers the examination program for state licensure and provides services to increase the efficiency of state and jurisdictional regulation.

Standards of Practice

1. Education
2. Examination
3. Supervision
4. Ethical Guidelines

What We Do:

- **Certify** Counselors who meet rigorous education and experience standards.
- **Provide** high-quality assessments to ensure Counselors are prepared to serve the public.
- **Advocate** for the importance and recognition of Mental Health Counselors (MHCs) in various sectors.

Importance and Impact of Mental Health Counselors (MHCs):

- **Access to Care:** MHCs provide crucial mental health services to underserved populations, improving overall community health.
- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Studies indicate that MHCs can reduce overall health care costs by providing preventative mental health services.¹
- **Quality of Care:** MHCs are trained to address a wide range of mental health issues, contributing to improved patient outcomes and satisfaction.
- **Workforce Needs:** Increasing MHC representation enhances the ability to serve low-income and rural communities effectively.

Our Request:

We urge the incorporation of the following key points into policy discussions to enhance support for U.S. consumers served by National Certified Counselors and Mental Health Counselors. Approval of these policies will increase consumer access to services provided by Counselors.

Increased Reimbursement in Medicare Rates

- **Mental Health Counselors (MHCs)** currently face significant disparity in reimbursement rates compared to other mental health providers.
 - *MHCs receive 75% of the Physician Fee Schedule Rate compared to the 100% of our counterparts in psychology.*²
- **Increasing reimbursement rates** would ensure better access to mental health services for Medicare beneficiaries.
- **Medicare beneficiaries 65 and older** report experiencing loneliness, depression, anxiety, and substance use disorder, making access to MHCs crucial for mental health care.³

Facts About Medicare⁴

- **60 million Americans** use Medicare as their primary insurance for health and mental health coverage.
- **15% of Medicare beneficiaries** are people under the age of 65 with disabilities.
- **20% of Medicare beneficiaries** live in rural areas.
- **22% of Medicare beneficiaries' income** is near or below the **federal poverty level (FPL)**.
 - 2025 FPL: \$14,580 for a single individual and \$30,000 for a family of four.

Mental Health Access Shortage Areas

The Health Resources Service Administration (HRSA) estimates⁵:

- **122 million consumers** live in a mental health access shortage area.
- **6,418** Mental Health Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HSPAs) across the country.
- **6,202** practitioners are needed.

Mental Health Counselors can help fill these gaps and provide Americans with the mental health care they need.

By the Numbers

- **More than 70,000** National Certified Counselors across the nation
- **More than 200,000** licensed Counselors in the nation⁶
- Jan. 1–Dec. 31, 2024: **49,507** Counselors **enrolled as Medicare providers**⁷



¹ Le, LK-D., Esturas, A. C., Mihalopoulos, C., Chiotelis, O., Bucholc, J., Chatterton, M. L., & Engel, L. (2021). Cost-effectiveness evidence of mental health prevention and promotion interventions: A systematic review of economic evaluations. *PLOS Medicine*, 18(5), e1003606. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1003606>

² Centers for Medicare & Medicare Services. (2025). Marriage and family therapists & mental health counselors. <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/payment/fee-schedules/physician-fee-schedule/marriage-and-family-therapists-mental-health-counselors>

³ National Institute on Aging. (2019). Social isolation, loneliness in older people pose health risks. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/news/social-isolation-loneliness-older-people-pose-health-risks>

⁴ Medicare Payment Advisory Commission. (2024). *Medicare beneficiary demographics*. https://www.medpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/July2024_MedPAC_DataBook_Sec2_SEC.pdf

⁵ HRSA Health Workforce. (2023, December). *Behavioral health workforce, 2023*. <https://bhw.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Brief-2023.pdf>

⁶ American Counseling Association (2021). *More than 30 years of mental health care inequity: Restricted access to providers for Medicare beneficiaries*. <https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/government-affairs/medicare-issue-brief.pdf>

⁷ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. (2025). *Medicare fee-for-service public provider enrollment*. <https://data.cms.gov/provider-characteristics/medicare-provider-supplier-enrollment/medicare-fee-for-service-public-provider-enrollment>