

National Association of Social Workers, Colorado Chapter

Steps to Colorado Licensure – LSW & LCSW

All links/pages mentioned can be found at the [NASWCO Chapter Website](#)

INTRODUCTION:

Social Work licensing falls under the Mental Health Licensing Section of the Division of Registrations within the Department of Regulatory Agencies (DORA). Colorado currently has two licenses for social workers: the LSW and the LCSW. These two licenses are for MSWs only as there is no Colorado licensure for BSW social workers. Note that the Colorado Department of Education licenses School Social Workers through a separate process.

Licensure is a multi-step process that encompasses both the LSW and the LCSW. The LSW* is (generally) required first, before earning an LCSW. You must (generally) have an LSW* to begin counting clinical hours toward earning a LCSW. The LSW and LCSW involve separate applications which are explained in the steps below – be sure you complete the correct application for each step.

*There are two caveats to the LSW requirement. A master's level social worker may be eligible for a Provisional License to begin accruing clinical supervision hours offered by an employer who is a state approved agency/Residential Child Care Facility OR may be eligible to begin accruing clinical supervision hours in a Community Mental Health Center/Exempt facility; check with DORA to determine if your agency is classified as such. While highly discouraged by NASWCO, another option, currently, is to be a Registered Unlicensed Psychotherapist (RP). Those who opt out of full licensure eliminate the possibility of billing any insurance (including for telehealth) or being licensed by endorsement in other states (again, including for telehealth). Moreover, as an RP, you will not be overseen by your own professional board of social work peers.

The LSW may also be acquired by MSWs under supervision in indirect/macro practice. Colorado does not have a license for the independent practice of indirect/macro social work.

The four major steps necessary for licensure, from LSW to LCSW, are as follows:

STEP ONE:

Applicants for the LSW are required to take Colorado's Mental Health **Jurisprudence Exam**, which is a state exam that tests knowledge of the laws and ethical standards that regulate the practice of Social Work in Colorado. You may take the Jurisprudence Exam at any time, including before you graduate. It is "open book" and taken online. You may retake the \$20 exam as many times necessary to pass (waiting 10 days in between). Keep the record of your passing results for your licensure application. To prepare, be sure to download the study guide from DORA's website. Consider watching the Jurisprudence Info Session offered by the CO Chapter (on our website), which is free for NASW Members. You can also review the 'Jurisprudence Help' page on the NASW-CO Website. Exam results are generally valid for five years, though you may need to retake it for your LCSW.

LSW candidates must also take an **examination administered by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB)**. In order to take the ASWB exam, you first must submit to ASWB your initial application (including documentation that educational requirements have been met and the "Qualifying Questionnaire" and "Affidavit" sections) and either a Certification of Master's or Doctoral Education Form* from your MSW Program Director OR official transcripts (sealed), along with a \$60 processing fee. ASWB will review these documents and determine whether you are eligible to take the ASWB exam. This generally takes 24-48 hours.

**Applicants who are awaiting graduation but have completed all of their program requirements may have their school complete the [Certification of Master's or Doctoral Education form](#) instead of providing a transcript. This Certification Form allows you to apply to take the exam for licensure and begin accruing hours without waiting for your transcripts. Once completed, this form can be uploaded as part of your application.*

Once verification is received from ASWB that you are eligible to take one of their exams, choose the exam you are going to take (see sidebar) and register for it with ASWB. If you fail, you must (generally) wait 90 days to retest (and you repay). More information about the ASWB test, including a candidate handbook, is on the www.aswb.org/colorado website. ASWB exams are administered by appointment at [Pearson Professional Centers](#) worldwide. There are no fixed administration dates. Instead, registered candidates can go to [Pearson VUE's website](#) to schedule a time to take the test. Special accommodations are available for candidates with disabilities. Additionally, many jurisdictions offer arrangements for candidates whose first language is not English.

Currently, LSW applicants may take either the ASWB Master's or Clinical exam (*the Advanced Generalist Exam is being phased out). In Colorado, unlike many states, ASWB and DORA permit the Clinical exam prior to accruing the clinical supervision and experience hours required for the LCSW, however this may change in the future. Exam results are generally valid for five years.



See Sidebar for comparison of ASWB exams

ASWB Offers two exams for CO licensure candidates*:

Master (for LSW only) - \$230

Clinical (for LSW and LCSW) - \$260

- If you take the Clinical Exam for your LSW and pass the exam, you do not have to retest once you finish experience and supervision hours for the LCSW
- If you take the Master's Level Exam for your LSW, you will also be required to take the higher level ASWB Clinical Exam after your supervision and experience hours are complete in order to obtain your LCSW
- Passing the Clinical Exam for your LSW will save you the cost and time of having to take an additional exam for your LCSW
- If you are planning to practice in another state, check with the licensing board in that state

We recommend taking the ASWB practice exams, available directly through ASWB. If you'd like additional preparation, NASW offers online exam prep courses for the ASWB Exams through PassitPro and others – check naswco.org and our CE Online Institute and social media postings. Special promotions and discounts are offered periodically for NASW Members.

STEP TWO:

Once ASWB verifies that you have passed an ASWB Exam (generally within one week), ASWB shares this information with DORA. At that time, you can submit online to DORA: \$70 LSW Application fee, DORA Application with Affidavit (same questions as those for ASWB), and your passing results from your Jurisprudence exam. Once approved, DORA confers your LSW. This usually takes two to eight weeks (it can take longer if a Board review is necessary; *NASWCO is advocating a statutory change to shorten this timeframe*). Incomplete LSW applications are kept on file by DORA for one year; completed LSW applications are maintained by DORA for five years. Contact DORA with questions:

dora_mentalhealthboard@state.co.us. 303-894-7800; chat: http://www.dora.state.co.us/pacific/chat/chat_test_edo.html

After you submit your application to DORA, you may complete your **required** profile for the **Healthcare Professions Profile Program (HPPP)** via the DORA HPPP internet portal. DORA suggests waiting 8-10 business days after submission of LSW application to allow time for electronic record to be created before completing the profile.

STEP THREE:

Once you have verification of your LSW license from DORA, and not before, you may begin to count experience and supervision hours. You must complete 3,360 hours concurrent with at least 96 hours of clinical supervision over a minimum of two years and a maximum of five years. Of the 96 required supervision hours, 48 must be face-to-face individual supervision (*NASWCO is advocating a statutory change to remove the face-to-face requirement and allow for tele-supervision of all hours*). The remainder may be in group supervision with no more than ten supervisees at a time. With rare exceptions, granted by the DORA Board, supervisors must hold a current Colorado State LCSW and be in good standing with DORA.

While supervisors are required to keep supervision records, we strongly advise supervisees to keep records of supervision sessions, regularly signed by both supervisor and supervisee. This is important for documenting hours and may be extremely helpful if a supervisorial relationship ends. For a detailed explanation of the hours, see Rule 14 (attached below or linked on the chapter website).

LSWs and LCSWs must comply with the Continuing Professional Development (commonly known as Continuing Education/CE) requirements. Most licensees (some are in exempt settings, per DORA) must complete 40 hours of CPD/CE every two years due at the end of every August in odd years. See the NASW and DORA websites for information. NASW offers free and discounted online and in-person CEs for Members.

STEP FOUR:

After completion of all experience and clinical supervision hours, submit your LCSW application form and necessary documentation online to DORA. This includes the "Post Degree Experience and Supervision Form" signed by your supervisor. If needed, take the higher level ASWB Clinical Exam. An updated HPPP also must be completed at the time of application. Submit your official MSW transcripts again, and DORA may require you to pass the Jurisprudence Exam again. Incomplete LCSW Applications are kept on file for five years by DORA. 2019 fee was \$142.

EXCERPTED FROM RULE 1.14 LICENSURE BY EXAMINATION (C.R.S. § 12-245-404)

4. Number of hours of post-degree experience practicing social work under supervision.

a. The post-degree experience practicing social work under supervision cannot be completed in fewer than twenty-four months and may involve supervision by more than one approved supervisor as defined in these Rules.

b. The two years of post-degree experience practicing social work under supervision required by section 12-245-404(2)(c), C.R.S., must have at least 3,360 hours of applied social work practice obtained in such a manner that they are reasonably uniformly distributed over a minimum of twenty-four months.

c. The post degree hours required under Rule 1.14(C)(4)(b) must meet the following requirements:

(1) Clinical social work practice for LCSW licensure (as noted in section 12-245-408, C.R.S.):

(a) At minimum, half of the work experience hours (1,680) must include a professional relationship that involves treatment, diagnosis, testing, assessment, or counseling. One or more may occur during any of the following activities:

(i) Assisting individuals or groups to alleviate mental disorders;

(ii) Understanding unconscious or conscious motivation;

(iii) Resolving emotional, relationship, or attitudinal conflicts; or

(iv) Modifying behaviors that interfere with effective emotional, biopsychosocial or intellectual functioning.

5. Number of hours of post-degree supervision.

a. Applicants must receive a minimum of 96 hours of supervision, at least forty-eight of which must be face-to-face individual supervision.

b. The post-degree supervision hours must be reasonably distributed over the hours of supervised experience in social work practice in a manner consistent with the accrual of the hours of supervised post-degree experience.