



Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselor

About

Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors provide treatment and advise people who suffer from alcoholism, drug addiction, or other mental or behavioral problems.

Job Outlook and Salary



- This occupation was identified as a high-demand job based on regional healthcare industry feedback
- The average annual wage is **\$55,902** (Seattle MSA)
- Hourly wages range from **\$19.67/HR** (25th percentile) to **\$31.41/HR** (75th percentile)

Job Tasks



- Evaluate clients' mental and physical health, addiction, or problematic behavior and assess their readiness for treatment
- Develop, recommend, and review treatment goals and plans with clients and their families
- Assist clients in developing skills and behaviors necessary to recover from their addiction or modify their behavior
- Work with clients to identify behaviors or situations that interfere with their recovery
- Teach clients' family members about addiction or behavior disorders and help them develop strategies to cope with those problems
- Refer clients to other resources and services, such as job placement services and support groups
- Conduct outreach programs to help people identify the signs of addiction and other destructive behavior, as well as steps to take to avoid such behavior

Education and Training



- Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors typically need at least a **Bachelor's degree**. However, **depending on the state and employer, educational requirements for these workers may vary from a high school diploma and certification to a master's degree**.
- Common fields of undergraduate study include **psychology, public policy and social services, and social science**. Workers with psychology, clinical social work, mental health counseling, and similar master's degrees may provide more services to their clients, such as private one-on-one counseling sessions, and they require less supervision than those with less education. Those interested should research their state's educational requirements.

Licensures



- **Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors in private practice must be licensed.** Licensing requirements vary by state, but all states require these counselors to have a master's degree and 2,000 to 4,000 hours of supervised clinical experience. In addition, counselors must pass a state-issued exam and complete continuing education every year. Contact information for your state's regulating board can be found through the National Board for Certified Counselors.
- **The licensure criteria for substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors outside of private practice vary from state to state.** For example, not all states require applicants to have a specific degree, but many require them to pass an exam. Contact information for individual states' licensing boards can be found through the Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network.
- **All states require mental health counselors to be licensed,** after completing a period of post degree supervised clinical work under the supervision of a licensed counselor.

Work Schedule



- Most substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors work full time. In some settings, such as inpatient facilities, they may need to work evenings, nights, or weekends.

Skills



- **Compassion.** Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors often work with people who are dealing with stressful and difficult situations, so they must be compassionate and empathize with their clients.
- **Interpersonal skills.** Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors must be able to work with different types of people. They spend most of their time working directly with clients or other professionals and must be able to develop and nurture good relationships.
- **Listening skills.** Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors need good listening skills. They must give their full attention to a client to be able to understand that client's problems and values.
- **Patience.** Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors must be able to remain calm when working with all types of clients, including those who may be distressed or angry.
- **Speaking skills.** Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors need to be able to effectively communicate with clients. They must express ideas and information in a way that their clients easily understand.

Technology



- **Database user interface and query software:** Database software; EAG Economic Analysis Group CaseTrack
- **Office Suite Software:** Microsoft Outlook; PowerPoint; Excel
- **Medical software:** Addison Health Systems WritePad EMR Systems; Athena Software Penelope Case Management; STI Computer Services ChartMaker; Varian Medical Systems

Education and Training Resources

The following regional education and training programs are examples of programs in the region that can help you obtain education and credentials to become a Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselor. Some programs may require additional preparation and completion of prerequisites.



County	Programs
King County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Washington Institute of Technology (https://www.lwtech.edu/) • Highline College (https://highline.edu) • Seattle Central College (https://seattlecentral.edu/)
Kitsap County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olympic College (https://www.olympic.edu/)
Snohomish County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edmonds College (https://www.edmonds.edu/)

Resources to Scholarships and Assistance Programs

- **Washington State Opportunity Scholarship:** <https://www.waopportunityscholarship.org/about/>
- **Washington College Grant:** <https://wsac.wa.gov/wcg>

References

- 2021 Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates. (2021). Retrieved December 16, 2021 from <https://media.esd.wa.gov/esdwa/Default/ESDWAGOV/labor-market-info/Libraries/Occupational-reports/OES/2021-Occupational-employment-and-wage-estimates.pdf>
- Occupational Employment Projections, Washington State Employment Security Department, 2021.
- Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, Washington State Employment Security Department, 2021.
- Substance Abuse & Behavioral Disorder Counselors at My Next Move. (n.d.). Retrieved August 18, 2021, from <https://www.mynextmove.org/profile/summary/21-1011.00>
- Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors: Occupational Outlook Handbook: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/substance-abuse-behavioral-disorder-and-mental-health-counselors.htm#tab-1>
- Washington Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. Retrieved January 25, 2022. *Washington Career Bridge*. Washington Career Bridge. <https://www.careerbridge.wa.gov/>