

American Counseling Association

119th Congress Legislative Agenda

The American Counseling Association (ACA) legislative agenda outlines critical priorities for promoting the counseling profession and furthering the ACA mission.

Empowering Decision-Makers to Shape Policies for Workforce Development, Accessibility, and 21st-Century Care: We equip decision-makers with the critical information they need to craft policies that drive progress in three key areas: strengthening the behavioral health workforce, enhancing accessibility to mental health services and advancing care that meets the demands of the 21st century.

2025-2026 Federal Priorities

Accessibility

ACA believes that everyone deserves access to mental healthcare and is dedicated to improving access for all people. To improve accessibility, ACA advocates for

School-Based Mental Health Services: ACA supports improving access to mental and behavioral health services at school. This includes advocacy for the Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) Grant under Title IV-A of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which provides flexible funding to advance student well-being and access to critical behavioral health services. To further investments in school-based mental health services and school counseling programs, ACA will

- Educate members of Congress, particularly those not on the education and funding committees, about the importance of Title IV-A.
- Engage Department of Education representatives and urge them to make resources available to states and school districts.

Mental Health Parity: ACA supports greater enforcement of mental health parity to increase client access, reduce costs to clients and minimize burdens on clinicians and clients. To facilitate this enforcement, ACA will

- Engage with federal agencies about enforcing the 2024 parity rule.
- Develop a resource to educate members on the issue and support parity advocacy.

Workforce Development

As the largest association of Licensed Professional Counselors (LPCs), we are dedicated to advancing the counseling profession. We advocate for policies to support counseling students, diversify the profession and ensure a sustainable career for counselors. To support workforce development, ACA advocates for:

Medicare Implementation and Reimbursement: Now that LPCs are eligible for Medicare reimbursement, ACA will work to facilitate LPCs becoming Medicare providers and advocate for increased Medicare reimbursement rates. This year, ACA will

- Engage in meetings and conversations around modernizing Medicare.
- Advocate for increasing Medicare reimbursement rates for LPCs.

Educational Support: ACA advocates for increased educational support for counselors, in order to encourage more students to pursue a career in counseling. ACA will:

- Advocate for increased funding for counseling programs and scholarships.
- Support student loan forgiveness for counselors.

American Counseling Association

119th Congress Legislative Agenda

Counselor Advancement: ACA supports counselors' advancement throughout their career and in a variety of counseling areas. ACA will

- Champion federal legislation that provides more funding for college and career counseling programs.
- Support additional resources and funding opportunities for provisional counselors

Support for Veterans: ACA advocates for creating more counseling positions within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to address workforce shortages, reduce wait times and ensure veterans have timely access to quality mental health care. ACA will

- Advocate for increased hiring of Licensed Professional Mental Health Counselors within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

21st Century Care

ACA is committed to ensuring 21st Century Care that is evidence-based and harnesses the benefits of technology which protects the clinician-client relationship. 21st Century Care includes incorporating trauma informed and culturally appropriate practices into systems of care. As part of 21st Century Care, ACA advocates for

Artificial Intelligence Regulations: The ACA is committed to advocating for the development of responsible and ethical regulatory policies pertaining to Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the fields of mental health and counseling. ACA will actively work to educate and collaborate with regulatory bodies to emphasize the importance of incorporating mental health considerations in AI regulations. ACA will

- Engage with the Trump Administration to share counselors' perspectives throughout the drafting and implementation of regulations.
- Work with the U.S. House Artificial Intelligence Caucus and members of the U.S. Senate to provide guidance on leveraging AI's capabilities while safeguarding clients' mental health through legislative and regulatory efforts.

Tele-behavioral health: Tele-behavioral health has expanded access for many, especially people in rural areas where there is limited access to behavioral health services. It also allows people to more easily connect to specialized care and have more flexibility in scheduling counseling sessions. To continue this modernization and accessibility, ACA will

- Advocate for the extension of tele-behavioral health provisions beyond the Public Health Emergency (PHE).

Appropriate Client Care: ACA supports policies that help counselors provide evidence-based, trauma informed and culturally appropriate care. ACA will

- Support congressional efforts to categorize conversion therapy as a fraudulent practice and prevent the exchange of money for it.
 - Advocate for programs that support diversifying the counseling field and encourage outreach to underserved communities.
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American Counseling Association

119th Congress Legislative Agenda

2025-2026 State Priorities

ACA partners with state branches, legislatures, and agencies to ensure regulations, rule-making, and public policy fully include and support counselors.

Workforce Development

Educational Pathways for Future Counselors: Incentivizing affordable and accessible pathways to college, including student loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement and outreach programs in underserved communities for diversified recruitment. Additionally, ACA encourages policies which reduce barriers in internship and supervision hours through state-funded initiatives.

Licensure Portability: Expanding the counseling workforce in all communities and states through ACA's landmark [Counseling Compact](#).

Workforce Expansion and Training: Promoting policies that grow the behavioral health workforce pipeline ensuring diversity within the field. Informing decision makers on best practices for training in high need areas like maternal mental health, trauma-informed care, the public health crisis of racism and service to underserved communities such as those who are institutionalized, incarcerated, seniors and people with disabilities.

Local Appropriations: Advocating increased state funding for local mental health programs to ensure counselors in community-based settings are well-resourced and able to provide quality care to those who need it most.

Fortifying the Military Community: Advocating for the inclusion of more LPCs in military and veteran services to reduce wait times and enhance mental health care delivery. Ensuring LPCs who are military-affiliated, through service or family, receive the support necessary to practice.

Accessibility

State-Level Parity: Supporting cross-state collaboration and insurance parity, improving access to care for all communities. Encouraging states to partner with each other and the federal government in addressing disparities and barriers to care through tailored policy specific to geographic need.

- **Insurance Parity:** Supporting states in enhancing federal parity standards (e.g., the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act) by requiring broader coverage and regular compliance reporting. Partnering with our members to engage state insurance commissions and regulatory entities regarding local concerns, service delivery and implementation.
- **Cross-State Parity and Compacts:** Leading the way with agreements like ACA's landmark [Counseling Compact](#) to facilitate practice across member states.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Encouraging states to harmonize standards for education, healthcare access and workforce development in the counseling field to reduce barriers for individuals and businesses operating in multiple states.

American Counseling Association

119th Congress Legislative Agenda

Telehealth Access for LPCs and Clients:

- **Coverage:** Supporting member advocacy in expanding Medicaid and private insurance to cover LPC telehealth services.
- **Infrastructure:** Partnering with members and branches on broadband expansion efforts that support LPCs in rural and underserved areas.
- **Cross-State Collaboration:** Encouraging telehealth policies that enhance multi-state practice and uniformity of care.

School-Based Mental Health: Enhancing funding and capacity for school-based counseling services in states to meet the national standard of counselor-to-student ratios (250:1), thereby ensuring students in all communities are provided access to quality care.

Equity in Mental Health: Leading the way in state partnerships and coalitions to enhance Medicaid, funding and local programming. Advancing culturally competent counseling education and services, ensuring all communities have access to qualified counselors.

21st Century Care:

Community-Based Mental Health: Strengthening mental health programs within community settings to address systemic issues, including racism, gun violence, hate crimes, family violence, substance abuse, gender-based violence, and suicide prevention. ACA collaborates with members to advocate for resources, funding, and the implementation of trauma-informed, culturally responsive practices that promote access to equitable care in every community.

Cutting-Edge Professional Standards: Promoting 21st-century standards in counseling, ACA advances best practices, uniform ethics, and evidence-based care. We lead state efforts to ban harmful practices like conversion therapy while advocating for inclusive, progressive policies that reflect modern, ethical, and scientifically supported approaches to mental health care.

Innovation in Behavioral Healthcare Delivery: Advancing safe, innovative AI policies and equipping counselors with training to use these technologies effectively while protecting client privacy. Supporting ACA state branches in addressing regulatory concerns related to AI and technology.

Crisis Intervention: Addressing Today's Behavioral Health Challenges: Advocating for community-based crisis intervention services that integrate a trauma-informed continuum of care and best practices, ensuring that counselors are equipped to provide effective care for individuals in crisis and raising awareness about the necessity of counselors in crisis intervention.

Meeting the Moment: Navigating the behavioral health crisis with urgency by driving strategic state engagement, implementing up-to-date best practices and fostering innovative policy development. Equipping counselors to adapt to evolving regulatory needs and trends to ensure a resilient, sustainable profession that meets regional, state and local demands in real time.

American Counseling Association

119th Congress Legislative Agenda

ACA has a new strategic framework for the future of professional counseling. View the [ACA Mission & Strategic Plan](#).

*ACA members are essential to counselor advocacy. Our counselors bring a unique perspective and subject matter expertise that's necessary for equitable evidence-based behavioral health policy. **Join our efforts at [Take Action](#) and read our monthly advocacy newsletter for the latest updates.***