

My name is Greg Molinaro MS, LPC and I am a Licensed Mental Health Counselor in the state of North Dakota. I live in District 7, at 4016 Heartland Drive, Bismarck, 58503. The following information I am sharing is from my professional counseling experiences, observations in the agencies I have practiced, and recent conversations with the North Dakota Board of Counseling Examiners, heads of the Masters in Counseling programs at locations across North Dakota, and Counseling Agencies in Minnesota who accept BCBS.

I am an individual citizen who proposed this change to the board and am in cooperation with them.

Problem Identified: There is an unnecessary barrier to access to Mental Health Counseling in North Dakota and a simple change to the language in the ND Century Code could correct it.

(Referencing ND Century Code “CHAPTER 43-47 COUNSELORS”—attached and highlighted)

- Currently, in North Dakota, we have three Tiers of Licensure: **LAPC, LPC, and LPCC.**
- In contrast, in Minnesota, they have two tiers: **LPC** (*designated supervised, or *designated independent after their supervision period), and **LPCC**
- Important note: In Minnesota, new Master’s in Counseling graduates can be reimbursed for services by BCBS, because they only have a single tier to supervision by an LPCC
- In contrast, in North Dakota, BCBS requires a two year wait for reimbursement qualification, because Master’s in Counseling graduates have the LAPC license, and BCBS have consistently refused it saying it is a two-tier supervision (LAPC > LPC > LPCC), and must wait until they achieve LPC status for BCBS to reimburse.
 - Just as a reference, Sanford insurance currently reimburses for **LAPC** in the state of North Dakota, so they are not at issue here.

Imagine then, the reality, that in the state of North Dakota, if you have BCBS insurance, you cannot access counseling with all the new Master’s in Counseling graduates. For two years! That is a tragic barrier to access for too many North Dakotans, Ironically, many of those new graduates go with many unfilled timeslots for most of those first two years until BCBS begins reimbursement. Available timeslots for counseling go unfilled because one of the top providers of mental health coverage, BCBS, will not cover the services.

I want to highlight this again. Many new Master’s in Counseling graduates have unfilled AVAILABLE spaces in their counseling schedule during their first two years Filling those open counseling slots could help narrow the gap of our mental health counseling needs and easily address and assist in the mental health crisis and shortage we are currently facing. With only a simple change to the titles of our licensed counselors in the ND Century Code, and BCBS reimbursing services to our new graduates, those empty slots can be filled, and many more North Dakotas could be served.

Solution Proposed: To ask the current legislative assemble to make a change to ND Century Code (CHAPTER 43-47 COUNSELORS).

The proposal would be only for a change in the current Century Code language:

- The titles: from, **LAPC,** to **LPC * designated supervised**
- The descriptions: “**associate professional counselor**” to “**Licensed Professional Counselor-supervised**”.
- The descriptions: “**Licensed associate professional counselor**” to “**Licensed Professional Counselor**” . Very little, if anything, would change in actual agency practice or NDBCE oversight and licensing.

(There is a second benefit to the licensure name change.

- 1) The NHSC Rural Community Loan Repayment Program, located at <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/loan-repayment/nhsc-rural-community-loan-repayment-program> does not recognize **LAPC** for the federal program, only **LPC** and above. New graduates, who may be willing to serve in rural, underserved areas for two years if they could partner with those communities and this federal program for student loan reimbursement, are denied that opportunity. The federal program begins at **LPC**, so currently new graduates must wait for two years to qualify. This is a barrier to opportunities and motivation for new graduates to serve at least half-time in a rural, underserved setting, and provide needed services to these valuable rural communities.