

White Paper Licensure for Genetic Counselors in Alaska

What's the issue?

Alaska is one of only 12 states that have not enacted licensure for genetic counselors. SB 281 would create licensing requirements for genetic counselors delivering services in Alaska, helping ensure patients have access to qualified genetic counselors across the state.

Who Are Genetic Counselors?

- Genetic counselors are healthcare professionals who have a specialized graduate degree, academic training, and clinical experience in both medical genetics and psychosocial counseling.
- Genetic counselors work providing patient care in specialties including Prenatal, Pediatrics, Oncology, Pediatrics, Cardiology, Neurology and other adult-onset conditions and are also employed in academic, laboratory, research, and biotechnology settings.

What Medical Services do Genetic Counselors Provide?

- Genetic counselors work with physicians and other healthcare providers, as part of a multidisciplinary team, or independently, to provide genetics services to families and/or individuals.
- Genetic counselors provide genetic counseling for patients and families at increased risk for a variety of genetic conditions with onset at birth through adulthood.
- Genetic counselors evaluate and assess risk for a genetic condition, educate patients about the condition and available management options, facilitate genetic testing and test interpretation when available and appropriate, and assess and address the psychosocial impact of a genetic condition in order to help families adapt.

Why Do Genetic Counselors Need to be Licensed?

- Alaska currently has no legal standard to determine who can represent themselves as genetic counselors.
- With genetic counseling services increasingly being delivered via telehealth, licensure gives patients peace of mind that they are meeting with a safe, qualified professional.
- Licensure would protect Alaskans by requiring that genetic counselors practicing in Alaska:
 - Have appropriate training in medical genetics and genetic counseling
 - Are certified by the American Board of Genetic Counseling or the American Board of Medical Genetics
 - Collect a satisfactory number of continuing education units to stay up to date in the rapidly changing field of genetics
 - Out-of-state providers providing genetic counseling by telehealth to patients in Alaska are licensed in Alaska
- Licensure would create a means for Alaska to standardize genetic counseling services and would prevent unqualified individuals from practicing genetic counseling within Alaska.
- Licensure will positively impact Alaska's economy:
 - Genetic counselors ensure appropriate tests are ordered and interpreted to facilitate proper medical management while reducing healthcare costs.
 - Licensure would make genetic counselors more easily billable and reimbursable through private insurance and Medicaid.
 - Improved reimbursement would create many more job opportunities for genetic counselors in Alaska, attracting trained genetic counselors to Alaska.