

LICENSURE FOR GENETIC COUNSELORS IN ALASKA

Within Alaska there are 7 genetic counselors, who live and work in Alaska and at least one genetic counselor who lives here and provides genetic counseling to patients in other states. These genetic counselors currently work providing patient care in specialties including Pre-Natal, Oncology, Pediatrics, and Cardiology and some other adult onset conditions. In addition, there are a number of genetic counselors who work for genetic testing labs or genetics consultancies who work with patients in Alaska but reside in other states.

Who Are Genetic Counselors?

- Genetic counselors are healthcare professionals who have a specialized graduate degree, academic training, and experience in both medical genetics and counseling.

What Medical Services do Genetic Counselors Provide?

- Genetic counselors work with physicians, as part of a multidisciplinary team, or independently, to provide genetics services to families and/or individuals.
- Genetic counselors consult with patients and families in cancer genetics, cardiovascular genetics, neurogenetics, reproductive genetics, pediatric genetics, and other genetics settings.
- 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.
- Licensure would protect Alaskans by ensuring 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 minimum number of continuing education units to stay up to date in the rapidly changing field of genetics.
- Licensure would create a means for Alaska to regulate 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