

Frequently Asked Questions: Psychology as a Multi-tiered Profession

APA has been earnestly considering the role of individuals with master's degrees in the psychology profession for 6–7 years. In that time there have been numerous workgroups, taskforces, and convenings about the master's degree in clinical, counseling, and school psychology—collectively known as health service psychology or HSP. These convenings have led to general agreement on understanding the profession as multitiered—i.e., there is value in a unified vision that includes individuals with doctoral and master's degrees.

APA elected and appointed leaders are developing recommendations for training, licensure, and regulations for masters-degree psychology professionals. The goals are to build consistency for the field, position psychologists to lead mental/behavioral health, and improve public access to high-quality care, rooted in psychological science. The questions below reflect the most common issues raised by psychologists and APA members.

What is motivating these changes?

- Psychology is responding to changes in the world—changes that call for psychologists to lead the mental/behavioral health industry into a future where demand for our services exceeds supply, where technology innovations are changing how services are delivered, and where the mental/behavioral health workforce is evolving.
- Psychologists are seeking to modernize the profession in this rapidly changing world and to elevate the voice of psychology and psychologists.

What are the facts about psychology education, licensing, and workforce?

- Psychology training programs graduate approximately 3,700 doctoral HSP psychologists per year. There are approximately 110,000 licensed psychologists in the U.S.
- Psychology training programs graduate 20,000+ individuals with a master's degree in HSP per year. These graduates are trained in psychology by psychologists. Yet only 10,000 total of these graduates have a master's-level psychology license.
- Almost all master's degree psychology graduates go to work and become licensed in other professions, like counseling, social work, or marriage and family therapy, unless they are trained in school psychology, which has its own certification and credentialing track.
- Licensing in other professions is available in all 50 states. In 30 states, master's degree graduates cannot be licensed to practice psychology in the community.
- APA historically has provided no guidance for psychology training or licensure at the master's level, so there is no consistency in master's training, licensure, or regulations across the country.
- If the master's degree professionals become licensed in psychology instead of other professions, the size of the psychology workforce will increase; this will provide APA Services Inc. (APASI), APA's companion 501(c)(6) advocacy organization, with additional leverage to advocate for issues such as reimbursement, mental health parity, and others.

Why now?

Multiple converging forces provide an opportunity to create a multitiered psychology profession, allowing master's trained psychology professionals to join the mental/behavioral health workforce with solid

grounding in psychology and psychological science. Examples include:

- [APA's Center for Workforce Studies](#) documented the gap between the supply of psychologists and the demand for those services, suggesting that another 15,000 licensed psychologists are needed to meet the demand. This gap is impossible to fix in the foreseeable future with psychologists only.
- Health care delivery systems continue to evolve and incorporate increasing numbers of master's degree professionals (i.e., physician associates—formerly known as physician assistants, and nurse practitioners) to deliver routine and front-line services.
- In 2024, Medicare approved reimbursement for mental health services delivered by master's degree professionals in counseling and marriage and family therapy. APASI successfully advocated that master's degree psychology professionals also be approved for Medicare reimbursement.

How will doctoral and master's students be trained for the future?

- Using the work of the [Board of Educational Affairs](#) (BEA)/[Board of Professional Affairs](#) (BPA) taskforces on competencies in doctoral and master's degree programs, BEA and BPA have developed a modernized Competency Framework to prepare the profession for the future. This Framework clarifies shared goals and distinctions in competencies expected of doctoral and master's degree psychology program graduates.
- APA gathered feedback on the framework via the APA comment portal for 60 days, from August through October.

What is happening with APA's Model Licensure Act?

- Licensing laws articulate requirements to become a licensed professional; these laws usually include educational coursework, supervised practice, scope of practice, and professional title.
- In most jurisdictions with psychology licensing at both doctoral and master's degree levels, there are clear legal and regulatory distinctions between the levels.
- In the 20 jurisdictions that license master's level psychology professionals, there is little consistency in master's education and supervision requirements, professional title, and scope.
- APA has a 2010 Model Licensure Act (MLA). That MLA is being updated and revised to better reflect current practice and to formulate recommendations for master's trained psychology professionals. The goal is to create consistency across the profession and across jurisdictions in licensing statutes and professional regulations, while identifying appropriate distinctions between the doctorate and master's levels.

How does APA plan to provide guidance to states for licensure of master's degree psychology professionals?

- The BPA has appointed a task force to revise APA's Model Licensure Act.
- Initial recommendations for Scope of Practice and Title for master's degree psychology professionals are out for public comment. The initial recommendations are expected to be considered by the APA Council of Representatives (Council) in 2025.
- APASI will consult with state associations to help them advocate to update their state licensing laws to incorporate the new Model Licensure Act, as desired.

Will master's degree psychology professionals be called "psychologists"?

- No, not in APA policy or recommendations. A few states already use "psychologist" in the title for masters' degree psychology practice. For example, [Michigan](#) uses the title "Master's Limited Psychologist." [Vermont](#) uses "Psychologist-Master" and "Psychologist-Doctorate."
- To help the public differentiate between doctoral and master's degree professionals, APA has recommended that the title "psychologist" should be reserved for doctoral-level professionals (as reflected in current APA policy).
- While APA has no authority to require a change, APA recommendations carry significant weight. Our comprehensive proposal will hopefully influence states to reserve the title "psychologist" for doctoral-level psychology professionals only and to identify a professional title for master's degree psychology professionals that is consistent with national norms.
- The recommended title for master's degree psychology professionals will likely contain "psychology" or "psychological" to convey that psychology is a distinct body of study and practice. E.g., the most common professional title across the country is "Psychology Associate."

Does psychology as a multi-tiered profession create more competition among psychologists and other mental health providers in the marketplace?

- Master's trained individuals in other mental health professions already practice in every state, so licensing of master's degree psychology professionals in more states should not dramatically change the market.
- As more states license master's degree psychology professionals, the marketplace may shift away from the other mental/behavioral health disciplines and toward master's degree professionals who are trained in psychology by psychologists.
- The trend across health care professions is a growing workforce of master's degree professionals, working at the appropriate scope of practice to address the significant public health need.

Will master's degree psychology professionals provide services independently?

- The scope of practice is expected to include some independence (e.g., psychotherapy), consistent with other licensed mental/behavioral health professionals with master's degrees.
- All master's degree mental/behavioral health professionals currently engage in some level of diagnostic assessment in initial interviews, and as needed to bill third-party payers. Accordingly, some routine assessments by master's degree psychology professionals will be part of the scope—for instance, screening assessments for the purpose of making a diagnosis and perhaps some forms of psychoeducational assessment.
- None of the recommendations will be intended to alter the current scope of practice for school psychologists.
- Recommendations regarding scope-of-practice are being considered by APA/APASI members serving on working groups, committees, and boards. All recommendations will undergo public comment before final approval, giving APA members and others the opportunity to provide input. There will be many opportunities for APA members, state leaders, and others to participate and ensure their voice is heard. APA has held four townhalls on this topic and plans to host more opportunities for public comment and engagement.

What is the expected impact on graduate programs?

- Currently, undergraduates with a psychology major choose to enroll in master's degree programs in other mental/behavioral health disciplines (social work, counseling, marriage and family therapy) because many states have no master's psychology degree licensure opportunities.
- In the future we expect the creation of more master's degree psychology programs and higher enrollment, further supporting the doctoral programs at those institutions.

Why is APA pursuing accreditation of master's programs in health service psychology?

- Accreditation is a federally recognized method of ensuring quality education/training. It facilitates consistency within the profession and across training programs in generating well-trained professionals to serve the public.
- The APA Commission on Accreditation (CoA) has accredited doctoral programs in HSP for many years and is now prepared to accredit master's programs. The CoA accredited its first master's degree psychology program in 2024.
- The Standards of Accreditation for doctoral and master's programs in HSP were approved as APA policy in 2015 and 2021, respectively. These standards articulate requirements for programs, including competencies that programs must provide opportunities for their students to acquire.
- CoA has developed [implementing regulations](#), which provide programs with general guidance about the content of competencies but does not offer specific strategies to implement competency-based education and assessment. Thus, education and training guidelines that articulate competency models serve as a bridge for programs seeking ways to meet accreditation requirements.
- By accrediting both doctoral and master's psychology degree programs, APA can help facilitate consistent training expectations across the country.

Will master's degree psychology professionals become voting members of APA?

- Master's degree psychology professionals already have some voting privileges within APA as associate members after one year of membership. They nominate candidates for president-elect, and vote for members on APA's Board of Directors, bylaws changes, and in the division apportionment ballot. Associate members may serve on APA Boards and Committees, but not on the Council of Representatives.

Summary timeline of APA recent deliberations and actions regarding psychology master's degree holders:

- **2017:** APA Council voted to "consider options for master's level training and/or practice" acknowledging "current issues and developments" had risen to a level that necessitated action.
- **2018:** APA Council voted to proceed with accreditation of master's degree programs in HSP.
- **2018:** BEA Blueprint Task Force produced a report, accepted by Council, outlining APA accreditation at the master's level.
- **2019:** APA's BEA and BPA jointly formed a task force to delineate competencies for students completing master's degree programs in HSP and to distinguish competencies for doctoral and master's degree holders.
- **2019:** APA's CoA began work to establish standards for accreditation of master's HSP programs (SoA-M).

- **2020:** APA's Board of Directors and Council held focused conversations on the future of psychology practice and education.
- **2021:** Master's Competencies Task Force recommended that BEA and BPA establish a different task force to update existing APA approved education guidelines on doctoral competencies to facilitate completion of master's competencies.
- **2021:** BEA and BPA jointly formed a task force to update the doctoral competencies with the expectation that doing so would then delineate the differences between those with a doctoral degree and those with a master's degree in HSP.
- **2021:** APA convened an Assembly on the Value/Distinctiveness of the Doctoral Degree in Health Service Psychology. Attendees representing constituencies across the association considered how the doctoral degree/license adds value to a future, multitiered psychology profession.
- **2021:** BPA formed a working group to consider an appropriate master's title and scope of practice in HSP that would inform future updates to the APA Model Licensure Act.
- **2021:** Council approved the Standards of Accreditation—Master's.
- **2023:** BPA received the report from the Master's Title and Scope Working Group.
- **2024:** BEA and BPA formed a workgroup to develop competencies for doctoral and master's degree education/training.
- **2024:** BPA task force to update the APA Model Licensure Act convened June 2024.
- **2024:** BEA and BPA hold multiple townhalls and engagements with APA members, SPTA members, education communities, and others.

For ease of dissemination, access a PDF (insert link) of the FAQ here.