

Changes to Education Requirements for Registered and Certified Counselors Due to the Passage of Assembly Bill (AB) 2473¹

1. What is AB 2473?

AB 2473 is state legislation that updates education requirements for registered and certified alcohol or other drug (AOD) counselors. AB 2473 mandates minimum required core competency education topics for registered and certified AOD counselors working within an AOD recovery and treatment program. AB 2473 also prohibits core competency education hour requirements for registered counselors from being lower than the hour requirements for certified peer support specialists.² DHCS has published BHIN No: 25-029 to implement AB 2473 education requirements for registered counselors, effective January 1, 2026.

2. How do counselors know if a certifying organization approved a specific education course(s)?

By January 1, 2026, all DHCS approved certifying organizations will publish a list of approved education courses that meet AB 2473 requirements. Registered counselors are encouraged to reach out to their certifying organization and/or review each certifying organization's website below to determine if an education course(s) meets the eighty (80) hours of education and core competency topic requirements.

- CAADE: <https://dev.caade.org/ab2473/>
- CADTP: <https://cadtpcounselors.org/education-directory/>
- CCAPP: [Find a School - CCAPP Education](#)

¹ [AB 2473 Substance use disorder: counselors](#). (September 27, 2022)

² [BHIN 25-010 Medi-Cal Peer Support Program Standards](#)

3. What is the difference between a first-year registered counselor and a registered counselor?

A first-year registered counselor is an individual who has been registered to provide AOD counseling services for less than one (1) year.

A registered counselor is an individual who has been registered to provide AOD counseling services for one (1) year or more and has renewed their registration at least once.

4. How does AB 2473 impact first-year registered and registered counselors?

All first-year registered and registered counselors must complete education in the core competency education topics. The education hours completed in core competency topics will count towards the total education hours that a registered counselor must complete to become a certified counselor. The total number of required education hours vary depending on when a counselor registered:

- a) Registered counselors who registered before July 1, 2025, and apply for initial certification on or after January 1, 2026, must submit proof of completion of the existing three hundred fifteen (315) education hour requirement when they apply for initial certification. These three hundred fifteen (315) hours must include education topics set forth in [CCR, Title 9, Section 13040, subdivisions \(a\)\(1\) through \(5\)](#) and all core competency education topics.
 - Registered counselors who are currently completing practicum for initial certification may have already completed core competency education topics through their existing curriculum.
 - Registered counselors in good standing (not revoked or suspended) who registered before July 1, 2025, are exempt from the requirement to obtain eighty (80) hours of education within six (6) months of registration.
- b) First-year registered counselors who register between July 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025, must submit proof of eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topics by July 1, 2026.
- c) First-year registered counselors who register on or after January 1, 2026, must submit proof of eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topics within six (6) months of their initial registration date.

5. How does AB apply to certified counselors?

The changes made by AB 2473 do not affect counselors certified before January 1, 2026.

6. Do registered counselors who registered prior to July 1, 2025, need to complete eighty (80) hours of education within six (6) months of registering?

No, registered counselors in good standing (not revoked or suspended) who registered before July 1, 2025, are exempt from the requirement to obtain eighty (80) hours of education within six (6) months of registration. However, they must complete 315 hours of AOD education including core competency topics prior to initial certification and should reach out to their certifying organization to ensure their completed courses meet the core competency topic education requirements (See FAQ #4).

7. Can individuals complete the eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topics before applying for initial registration?

Yes, individuals may complete the eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topics before applying for initial registration with a DHCS-approved certifying organization. Individuals may have completed a portion of their eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topics prior to initial registration; therefore, individuals are encouraged to check each certifying organization's website to verify if the course(s) completed are approved by a certifying organization to determine which certifying organization will accept the education completed.

8. How long are completed education hours valid?

Education hours do not expire.

9. What happens if a first-year registered counselor or registered counselor completes education that is not approved by a certifying organization?

If a certifying organization does not approve a counselor's submission of proof of their required education hours, the certifying organization must inform the counselor of the missing education. A first-year registered counselor must complete education hours that have been approved by their certifying organization to renew their registration, and a registered counselor must complete approved education hours to become certified. Certifying organizations may deny education hours if an inadequate number of hours were submitted, all core competency education topics were not completed, or if an education provider or course was not approved by the certifying organization.

By January 1, 2026, certifying organizations will publish a list of approved education providers and courses that may be used to meet the eighty (80) hours of education including core competency education requirements. Counselors can contact their chosen certifying organization to find out whether the certifying organization has approved a certain education course.

Counselors must work with a DHCS-approved, certifying organization of their choice and are encouraged to review each certifying organization's website to determine if the certifying organization provides pathways to education providers and courses that meet their education needs.

10. What happens if a first-year registered counselor fails to complete the eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topics within six (6) months of registration?

If the certifying organization determines that a first-year registered counselor did not complete the required eighty (80) hours of education, including core competency topics, within six (6) months of registration, the first-year registered counselor must complete the missing education and obtain approval of the education from their certifying organization before their registration expires. If the first-year registered counselor fails to complete the education requirements needed for renewal, their credential will expire, and the first-year registered counselor will not be eligible to provide counseling services until their credential is renewed. Counselors may receive credit for completed education towards the eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topic requirements, subject to certifying organization approval.

Please also see Question 4 above. First-year registered counselors who registered between July 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025, must submit proof of eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topics by July 1, 2026 (rather than within six months of their registration date)

11. What happens if a certifying organization denies a first-year registered counselor or registered counselor's application?

If the certifying organization denies a first-year registered counselor or registered counselor's application, the written notice of denial must include the reason(s) for denial and the first-year registered counselor or registered counselor's right to appeal, in accordance with California Code of Regulations, Title 9, section 13070.

12. Are the eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topics included in the three hundred fifteen (315) education hours and education topics required for an AOD counselor's initial certification?

Yes, if a certifying organization approves and accepts the core competency education hours submitted by a first-year registered counselor or registered counselor for registration renewal, then those same core competency education hours will count towards the education hours required for initial certification.

Counselors are encouraged to check with their certifying organization to determine whether the courses they are seeking to enroll in meet the eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topics, which are applicable towards the 315 hours of education and education topics required for initial certification.

13. Who is exempt from AB 2473 education requirements?

a) AOD counselors in good standing (not revoked or suspended) who registered with a DHCS-approved certifying organization prior to July 1, 2025, are exempt from completing eighty (80) hours of education within the first six (6) months of registration.

b) AOD counselors in good standing (not revoked or suspended) who are registered with a DHCS-approved certifying organization and have a master's degree in psychology, social work, marriage and family therapy, or counseling are exempt from completing the core competency education topics. However, first-year registered counselors with the aforementioned degrees must still submit proof of completion of eighty (80) hours of education prior to registration renewal.³

c) The following individuals do not need to become registered and certified with a DHCS-approved certifying organization, therefore are exempt from all AB 2473 education requirements.

- Graduate students affiliated with university programs in psychology, social work, marriage and family therapy, or counseling, who are completing their supervised practicum hours to meet postgraduate requirements,⁴
- Associates registered with the Board of Behavioral Sciences; and
- Licensed professionals, as defined by DHCS.⁵

Only the exemptions above are allowable, and education requirements will not be waived for any other reason.

14. Are there hardship exceptions to the eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topic requirements?

No, DHCS does not have the authority to grant hardship exceptions for the eighty (80) hours of education and core competency education topic requirements.

15. How long are registration credentials valid?

Registration credentials are valid for one (1) year unless revoked or suspended.

16. When do first-year registered counselors and registered counselors need to submit a registration renewal application?

First-year registered counselors and registered counselors must apply for registration renewal at least one hundred twenty (120) calendar days before their registration

³ [Health and Safety Code 11833\(b\)\(9\)](#)

⁴ [BHIN-23-008](#) Exemption from Registration or Certification Requirement: AB

⁵1860 [CCR, Title 9, Chapter 8, § 13015 \(a\) Licensed Professional Definition](#)

expiration date.

17. How many education hours do registered counselors need to complete to renew their registration credential?

Registered counselors who have completed fewer than three hundred fifteen (315) hours of AOD education must complete a minimum of fifty (50) hours of AOD education annually. The AOD education must be completed with an education provider approved by the certifying organization and must include topics set forth in [CCR, Title 9, Section 13040, subdivisions \(a\)\(1\) through \(5\)](#) or any core competency education topics indicated in [BHIN No: 25-029](#). The minimum of 50 hours of AOD education annually will count towards the initial certification education requirements.

Registered counselors who have completed three hundred fifteen (315) hours of AOD education but have not received a certification credential must submit twenty (20) hours of continuing education to qualify for registration renewal. The continuing education must be completed with an education provider approved by the certifying organization and must include topics set forth in [CCR, Title 9, Section 13040, subdivisions \(a\)\(1\) through \(5\)](#) or any core competency education topics indicated in [BHIN 25-029](#).

18. Can an education course that covers multiple core competency education topics satisfy the requirements for more than one core competency topic? (For example, can confidentiality be included in a course that covers law and ethics instead of being a stand-alone course?)

Yes, a course may satisfy the requirement for more than one core competency education topic. However, the ASCEND curriculum, discussed in the next section, provides each core competency education topic as a standalone course.

19. Does the education that is required for Certified Peer Support Specialists meet the eighty (80) hour requirement including core competency education topics?

No. The educational requirements for registered counselors are different from the requirements currently established for Certified Peer Support Specialists.

20. Who do I contact if I have questions regarding AB 2473?

Questions regarding [BHIN No: 25-029](#) or [AB 2473](#) should be directed to the Counselor and Medication Assisted Treatment Section by email at: DHCSOINQUIRY@DHCS.CA.GOV.

Situational questions on how these requirements apply to you should be directed to your certifying organization. More information on DHCS-approved certifying organizations may be found here: [Counselor Certification Organizations](#).

The University of California, San Diego (UCSD) Division of Extended Studies AB 2473 Free Curriculum Sponsored by DHCS: Advancing SUD Counselor Education and Development (ASCEND) Program

21. What is the UC San Diego Extended Studies' AB 2473 Free Curriculum Sponsored by DHCS: Advancing SUD Counselor Education and Development (ASCEND) Program?

The ASCEND program is a free, self-paced, asynchronous online course that is sponsored by DHCS and will be made available by UC San Diego Extended Studies.

22. What is the cost of the ASCEND Program and when will it be available?

All courses completed through the ASCEND Program are **free**. The ASCEND Program will be made available by UC San Diego Extended Studies, in January 2026 through June 30, 2028. Enrollment for the course opened on December 1, 2025. Certifying organizations are not required to accept educational hours obtained through this free course. AOD counselors are encouraged to confirm with the certifying organization of their choice whether the education provided through ASCEND Program will count towards that certifying organization's certification program before ASCEND Program enrollment.

23. Who is the ASCEND Program curriculum intended for?

Individuals who are seeking to provide substance use disorder counseling services within California licensed and/or certified alcohol or other drug (AOD) recovery and treatment programs, first year registered counselors, and registered counselors are eligible to enroll in the ASCEND Program.

The following individuals are not eligible to enroll in the ASCEND Program: Licensed professionals, as defined by DHCS;⁵ associates registered with the Board of Behavioral Sciences; graduate students affiliated with university programs in psychology, social work, marriage and family therapy, or counseling, who are completing their supervised practicum hours to meet postgraduate requirements; administrative staff who are not involved in providing direct substance use disorder counseling services; and counselors outside of California.

24. Are AOD counselors required to complete the ASCEND Program curriculum in order to meet the requirements of AB 2473?

No, AOD counselors are not required to complete the ASCEND Program curriculum. AOD counselors seeking registration renewal may complete education courses through any education provider approved by their certifying organization. AOD counselors are encouraged to contact their chosen certifying organization to confirm that their education provider and course is approved. AOD counselors do have the option to work with any accredited and DHCS-approved certifying organization and are encouraged to review each certifying organization's website to determine if the certifying organization provides pathways to education providers and courses that meet their education needs.

25. Can an the ASCEND Program curriculum be used to satisfy continuing education unit (CEU) requirements for AOD counselors who are already certified or exempt from registration and certification requirements in accordance with Health and Safety Code 11833(d)⁶?

No, the ASCEND Program curriculum does not satisfy requirements for CEUs for licensed or certified counselors.

26. What do first-year registered and registered counselors submit to their certifying organization as proof of completing coursework to meet the AB 2473 requirements?

First year registered and registered counselors may submit a certificate or transcript issued by their education provider or UC San Diego Extended Studies to the certifying organization as proof of completion. Certificates and transcripts will include the student's legal name, the name of the education provider, title of the course, and number of units/hours completed.

DHCS recommends that AOD counselors confirm with the DHCS- approved certifying organization of their choice whether the education hours provided through the ASCEND Program will count towards that certifying organization's certification program **before** ASCEND course enrollment. Certifying organizations are not required to accept this free course. However, certifying organizations are required to publish information about the courses they have approved that indicates whether courses can be used to fulfill the 80 hours of education and core competency education topic requirements.

⁶[Health and Safety Code 11833\(d\)\(1\)](#) The following individuals are exempt from the requirement to be registered or certified by a department-approved certifying organization:

1. A graduate student affiliated with university programs in psychology, social work, marriage and family therapy, or counseling, who is completing their supervised practicum hours to meet postgraduate requirements.
2. An associate registered with the Board of Behavioral Sciences.
3. A licensed professional, as defined by the department.

Counselors may choose to register with any DHCS-approved certifying organization that provides access to educational courses that meet their educational needs.

27. What language(s) will the ASCEND Program curriculum be made available in?

At this time, the free online course will only be available in English?

28. How do first-year registered counselors, registered counselors, and individuals seeking to become substance use disorder counselors sign up for the ASCEND Program?

Sign up for the [free ASCEND Program](#) to get more information. If a certifying organization has accepted and approved the ASCEND Program, the certifying organization will also provide enrollment information on its website.

29. Other than the ASCEND Program, are there other education options that provide low-cost or free options to meet the same requirements?

Yes, there are number of education providers that have either low or no cost options. For instance, there are currently 48 substance use disorder studies programs at California community colleges. Although some qualifications apply, these colleges are able to provide state and federal gift aid to cover not just the cost of tuition and/or textbooks, but help with cost of living such as housing, transportation, food and more, while also offering options for childcare and health services. Similarly, private education providers may also qualify for federal gift aid to cover education costs, as well as possible scholarships. Counselors may reach out to their certifying organization or speak with their local or preferred education provider for additional information.

30. Other than the ASCEND Program, are there other education options that provide low-cost or free options to meet the same requirements?

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