

STAFFING

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for Social Worker GS-185 appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3).
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. The pages in this handbook replace the corresponding page numbers in VA Handbook 5005. These changes will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005 that is maintained on the [Office of Human Resources Management](#) Web site. This revision clarifies that the required masters in social work degree must be from a program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The CSWE accredits graduate programs in social work by determining the compliance of each with CSWE's Education Policy and Accreditation Standards. The most prevalent degree title of these graduate programs in social work is Master's of Social Work (MSW). However, CSWE also accredits graduate programs in social work that grant master's level degrees with other titles, including Master of Science in Social Work (MSSW), Master of Social Service Administration (MSSA), Master of Social Service (MSS), Master of Social Administration (MSA), and Master of Social Welfare. CSWE considers each of these to be fully accredited graduate degrees in social work, and should be accepted as meeting the education requirement for appointment in VA.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management.
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing.
- 5. RESCISSIONS:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
Roger W. Baker
Assistant Secretary for
Information and Technology

/s/
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APPENDIX G39. SOCIAL WORKER QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-185
Veterans Health Administration

1. COVERAGE. The following are requirements for appointment as a social worker in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). These requirements apply to all VHA social workers in the General Schedule (GS)-185 series, including those assigned to VA medical centers, Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), Vet Centers, Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) offices, and VHA Central Office.

2. BASIC REQUIREMENTS. The basic requirements for employment as a VHA social worker are prescribed by statute in 38 U.S.C. 7402(b)(9), as amended by section 205 of Public Law 106-419, enacted November 1, 2000. To qualify for appointment as a social worker in VHA, all applicants must:

a. **Citizenship.** Be a citizen of the United States. (Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3g this part.)

b. **Education.** Have a master's degree in social work [] from a school of social work fully accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). Graduates of schools of social work that are in candidacy status do not meet this requirement until the school of social work is fully accredited. A doctoral degree in social work *may not* be substituted for the master's degree in social work. [Verification of the degree can be made by going to the [CSWE website](#) to verify if that social work degree meets the accreditation standards for a master of social work.]

c. **Licensure.** Persons hired or reassigned to social worker positions in the GS-185 series in VHA must be licensed or certified by a state to independently practice social work at the master's degree level. Current state requirements may be found on the [OHRM website](#).

(1) **Exception.** VHA may waive the licensure or certification requirement for persons who are otherwise qualified, pending completion of state prerequisites for licensure/certification examinations. This exception only applies up to the full performance level. For grade levels above the full performance level, the candidate must be licensed or certified.

(a) For grades below or at the full performance level, VHA social workers who are not licensed or certified at the time of appointment must become licensed or certified at the independent, master's level within 3 years of their appointment as a social worker. Most states require 2 years of post-MSW experience as a pre-requisite to taking the licensure/certification exam, and VHA gives social workers one additional year to pass the licensure/certification exam. In California, where the prerequisites for licensure exceed two years, social workers must become licensed at the independent, master's level within one year of meeting the full California prerequisites for licensure.

(b) It is VHA policy that a VHA social worker who does not yet have a license that allows independent practice must be supervised by a licensed independent practitioner of the same discipline who is a VA staff member and who has access to the electronic health record.

(c) Different states have different levels of licensure or certification, making it difficult for VHA staff to determine the independent practice level. Each state, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia completed surveys identifying the level of licensure or certification allowing independent practice.