

# Rehabilitation Counselor

## History

Initially, rehabilitation professionals were recruited from a variety of human service disciplines, including public health nursing, social work, psychology, and school counseling. Although educational programs began to appear in the 1940s, it was not until the availability of federal funding for rehabilitation counseling programs in 1954 that the profession began to grow and establish its own identity. Historically, rehabilitation counselors primarily served working-age adults with disabilities. Today, the need for rehabilitation counseling services extends to persons of all age groups who have disabilities. Rehabilitation counselors also may provide general and specialized counseling to people with disabilities in public human service programs and private practice settings.

Rehabilitation counseling has been recognized as a significant human service program in the United States. A major value of rehabilitation counseling has been the importance of assisting individuals with disabilities deal with the various issues that influence self-sufficiency and employment. The success of programs has been supported by federal legislation of many types since 1920. Legislation has been passed that extended services to individuals with intellectual disabilities and mental illness, funded academic preparation programs for rehabilitation counselors, established a national commission on architectural barriers, and established a national center for deaf-blind students. Legislation directed at the rights of individuals with disabilities has also been significant.

## Career Description

Three of the key goals of rehabilitation counseling are to empower individuals to make informed choices, help individuals achieve positive mental health, and maximize opportunities for economic independence (obtain employment if possible). Rehabilitation counselors assist people with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities to become or remain self-sufficient, productive citizens. Working directly with an individual with a disability or their advocates, a rehabilitation counselor is a special type of professional counselor who helps evaluate and coordinate needed services to assist people with disabilities in coping with limitations caused by such factors as cognitive and learning difficulties, environmental and societal discrimination and barriers, psychological conflict/distress, or loss of physical/functional ability. They also provide services to individuals without disabilities who are experiencing stress and coping-difficulties, problems with living, career indecision, job displacement, and general mental health issues. Disabilities may result from congenital disability, illness and disease, work-related injuries, automobile accidents, the stresses of war, work, daily life, and the aging process. Rehabilitation counselors help individuals with disabilities deal with societal and personal problems, plan careers, and find and keep satisfying jobs. They also may work with individuals, professional organizations, and advocacy groups to address the environmental and social barriers that create obstacles for people with disabilities. The rehabilitation counselor builds bridges between the often isolated world of people with disabilities and their families, communities, and work environments. They may also assist individuals in adjusting in society by helping them move from a position of dependence to independence.

Other responsibilities for the rehabilitation counselor include:

- Evaluating an individual's potential for independent living and employment and arranging for medical and psychological services and vocational assessment, training, and job placement.
- Evaluating medical and psychological reports and conferring with physicians and psychologists about the types of work individuals can perform
- Working with employers to identify or modify job responsibilities to accommodate individuals with disabilities

The rehabilitation counselor draws on knowledge from several fields, including counseling, psychology, medicine, sociology, social work, education, and law. Their specialized knowledge of disabilities and environmental factors that influence adjustment, as well as specific knowledge and skills, differentiate rehabilitation counselors from other types of counselors. Rehabilitation counseling is considered a specialized counseling profession.

## Employment Characteristics

Reflecting this wide range of job opportunities, rehabilitation counselors are often employed in positions with different job titles, such as counselor, job placement specialist, substance abuse counselor, rehabilitation consultant, independent living specialist, or case manager. The roles and responsibilities of rehabilitation counselors have expanded greatly over the last ten years, further increasing the attractiveness of a career in the profession. Rehabilitation counselors, for example, have begun to determine, coordinate, and arrange for rehabilitation and transition services for children within school systems. In addition, rehabilitation counselors are providing geriatric rehabilitation services to older persons with health problems, and workers injured on the job are increasingly receiving rehabilitation services through private rehabilitation counseling companies and employers' disability management and employee assistance programs. They may also become life-care planners assisting individuals who will experience major long-term disability. Many former teachers, attorneys, nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, clergy, and business people have found second careers as professional rehabilitation counselors.

## Salary

Average annual salaries range between \$45,000 and \$78,000, depending on work setting (Survey of Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification, 2008). The salary range per year in the private sector is estimated at between \$55,000 and \$75,000 (Survey of International Association of Rehabilitation Professionals, 2008). According to a

national survey conducted by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation, the average 2007 starting salary for rehabilitation counselors in the public sector was \$36,100 and starting salaries ranged between \$16,000 and \$54,900.

May 2009 data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics ([www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211015.htm](http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes211015.htm)) show that wages at the 10th percentile are \$20,440, the 50th percentile (median) \$31,210, and the 90th percentile \$55,580. Average salaries in states that require the master's degree or disability-specific knowledge and skills such as sign language may be considerably higher. Determining salary opportunities are complicated by the manner in which job requirements vary in various states. Salary requirements in most states require a master's degree, but some states only require a bachelor's degree, which decreases the overall national salary mean.

Many rehabilitation counselors will choose work in state or federal rehabilitation agencies or community rehabilitation programs. Others will seek opportunities in the private or for-profit sector of rehabilitation. Because all state rehabilitation agencies follow the same general procedures, a rehabilitation counselor has geographical mobility and can find employment throughout the United States and its territories. Other potential employers include comprehensive rehabilitation centers, universities and academic settings, insurance companies, substance abuse rehabilitation centers, correctional facilities, halfway houses, and independent living centers.

### **Employment Outlook**

Rehabilitation counselors serve a large portion of the US population. An estimated 54 million Americans have physical, mental, or psychological disabilities that restrict their activities and prevent them from obtaining or maintaining jobs. Consequently, the employment outlook for the profession is excellent. Based on national employment outlook studies and regional and state surveys, hundreds of rehabilitation counselor positions are expected to be available in the coming years for qualified master's level professionals. Recent studies show that rehabilitation counselor education programs are not graduating sufficient numbers of qualified students to meet current and anticipated marketplace needs.

### **Education and Training**

**Length.** Rehabilitation counselor education programs typically provide between 18 and 24 months of academic and field-based clinical training. Clinical training consists of a practicum and a minimum of 600 hours of supervised internship experience. Clinical field experiences are available in a variety of community, state, federal, and private rehabilitation-related programs. Most accredited master's-level programs require 60 graduate hours of coursework. This allows graduates to become CRCs or LPCs in most states. Most public sector and private sector rehabilitation programs require the master degree.

**Prerequisites.** Although no formal requirements exist, most rehabilitation counseling graduate students have undergraduate degrees in rehabilitation services, psychology, sociology, or other human services-related fields.

**Curriculum.** Rehabilitation counselors are trained in

- Counseling theory, skills, and techniques
- Individual and group counseling
- Environmental assessment
- Psychosocial and medical aspects of disability, including human growth and development
- Social and cultural diversity
- Principles of psychiatric rehabilitation
- Case management and rehabilitation planning
- Issues and ethics in rehabilitation service delivery
- Technological adaptation
- Vocational evaluation and work adjustment
- Career counseling
- Research and program evaluation
- Job development and placement

In addition, students may enroll in courses that address content such as:

- Marriage and family counseling
- Substance abuse rehabilitation
- Juvenile and adult offender rehabilitation
- Intellectual disabilities
- Communication disorders
- Sign language
- Stress management
- Psychological testing
- Conflict management
- Crisis counseling
- DSM diagnosis and treatment planning
- Rehabilitation administration

### **Licensure, Certification, and Registration**

Certification and licensure of rehabilitation counselors help protect the public and provide a means of identifying those

individuals who possess the minimum training and meet supervised work experience standards established by professional groups and governmental agencies.

**Certification.** The Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC), an independent credentialing body incorporated in 1974, certifies rehabilitation counselors throughout the United States and in Canada who meet educational and work experience requirements, pass an examination, and maintain certification by completing 100 hours of acceptable continuing education credit every five years.

**Licensure.** A counseling license is a credential authorized by a state legislature that regulates the title and/or practice of professional counselors. Rehabilitation counselors are eligible for licensure as professional counselors in nearly all states that regulate counselors; licensure requirements include passing an examination, acquiring needed supervised counseling experience, and, in some states, completing specified coursework.

**Registration.** A number of state workers' compensation laws or regulations specify education, training, and/or credentials requirements for people providing rehabilitation counseling services to workers with disabilities. In these states, rehabilitation counselors pay a fee and provide proof of education and/or certification to register with the state workers' compensation agency. Many states also require the certified rehabilitation counselor (CRC) credential, although the permitted scope of services may vary from one state to the next.

## **Inquiries**

### **Careers**

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### **Certification**

Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification  
Cindy Chapman, Executive Director  
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### **Program Accreditation**

Council on Rehabilitation Education  
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