

Licensing and credentialing bodies' inquiry of physician mental health



THE MYTH

The Joint Commission and the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) require that medical licensing boards, credentialing bodies, and professional liability insurance carriers ask applicants about any past history of mental illness or substance use disorder on licensure, credentialing and other applications.

DEBUNKING THE MYTH

Neither The Joint Commission nor the FSMB require that licensing and credentialing organizations such as state licensure, physician credentialing services, and professional liability insurance carriers ask probing questions about clinicians' past mental health, addiction, or substance use history on licensure and credentialing applications. Rather, they strongly encourage them to refrain from including these types of questions when collecting professional information from clinicians for credentialing, privileging or other purposes.¹

Despite a growing body of evidence demonstrating that asking questions about mental health, addiction, or substance use history on licensure and other applications deters physicians from seeking care, several state medical license applications and credentialing applications continue to ask these questions.^{2,3}

For state medical boards that prefer to include questions that address physicians' mental health to elicit information intended to protect patients, the FSMB advises that they do so in ways that (1) limit inquiries to current impairments and (2) don't discourage physicians from seeking out treatment.^{1,4} Further, the FSMB recommends that these organizations avoid public disclosure of a physician's diagnosis and offer non-reporting options to physicians who are receiving treatment and in good standing with a recognized physician health program (PHP) or other appropriate health care professional.⁴

AMA Policy

[Licensure Confidentiality H-275.970](#)

Resources

- Federation of State Medical Boards. "Physician Wellness and Burnout: Report and Recommendations of the Workgroup on Physician Wellness and Burnout," 2018. Accessed Dec. 8, 2022. <https://www.fsmb.org/siteassets/advocacy/policies/policy-on-wellness-and-burnout.pdf>
- The Joint Commission. "Joint Commission Reiterates Importance of Removing Barriers to Mental Health Care for Staff," published online March 31, 2021. Accessed Nov. 15, 2022. <https://www.jointcommission.org/-/media/tjc/documents/federal-relations-and-public-policy/03312021-removing-barriers-to-mental-health-treatment-statement.pdf>

- Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes Foundation. “Improving Licensure & Credentialing Applications,” accessed Nov. 15, 2022. <https://drlornabreen.org/removebarriers/>
- #FirstResponderFirst and Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes Foundation. “Remove Intrusive Mental Health Questions from Licensure and Credentialing Applications: A Toolkit to Audit, Change, and Communicate,” published in 2022 as part of the “All In: Wellbeing First for Healthcare” campaign. Accessed Nov. 15, 2022. https://drlornabreen.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ALLIN22_Licensure-Credentialing_Toolkit_V3.pdf
- Saddawi-Konefka D, Brown A, Eisenhart I, Hicks K. Consistency between state medical license applications and recommendations regarding physician mental health. *JAMA Network*. 2021;325(19). Accessed Nov. 15, 2022. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2780002>
- Dyrbye LN, West CP, Sinsky CA, Goeders LE, Satele DV, Shanafelt TD. Medical licensure questions and physician reluctance to seek care for mental health conditions. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*. 2017;92(10):1486-1493. Accessed Nov. 15, 2022. [https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196\(17\)30522-0/fulltext](https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196(17)30522-0/fulltext)

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2. Saddawi-Konefka D, Brown A, Eisenhart I, Hicks K. Consistency between state medical license applications and recommendations regarding physician mental health. *JAMA Network*. 2021;325(19). Accessed Nov. 15, 2022. <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2780002>
3. Dyrbye LN, West CP, Sinsky CA, Goeders LE, Satele DV, Shanafelt TD. Medical licensure questions and physician reluctance to seek care for mental health conditions. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*. 2017;92(10):1486-1493. Accessed Nov. 15, 2022. [https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196\(17\)30522-0/fulltext](https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196(17)30522-0/fulltext)
4. Federation of State Medical Boards. Physician Wellness and Burnout: Report and Recommendations of the Workgroup on Physician Wellness and Burnout; 2018. Accessed Dec. 8, 2022. <https://www.fsmb.org/siteassets/advocacy/policies/policy-on-wellness-and-burnout.pdf>