

Reference Guide: Social Work Credentials

When hiring a social worker, you'll want to be familiar with different qualifications and their acronyms. This reference guide will help you understand social work credentials. **More information can be found on the North Carolina Social Work Certification and Licensure Board website (www.ncswboard.gov).**

Related Degrees

Not every college and university has a social work program. Applicants for social work jobs may have related degrees, like Human Services, Human Development & Family Sciences, Psychology, and others. While coursework for these degrees may be similar to social work, the main difference is typically that social work programs have more emphasis on hands-on learning and skills like interviewing and assessment.

Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)

A BSW is an undergraduate degree. All BSW programs follow a curriculum outlined by a national accrediting body. In addition to academic coursework, BSW graduates must complete 400 hours of supervised internship hours arranged by their school, usually in their senior year.

Certified Social Worker (CSW)

BSW graduates can take a knowledge-based exam to become a Certified Social Worker.

Master of Social Work (MSW)

An MSW is a graduate degree. Like BSWs, all MSW programs follow a curriculum outlined by a national accrediting body. An MSW is usually a two-year program, and graduates must complete 900 supervised internship hours. MSW students often take generalized coursework in their first year, and then more specialized courses in the second year that might focus on clinical skills, case management, or social policy.

Certified Master Social Worker (CMSW)

MSW graduates can take a knowledge-based exam to become a Certified Master Social Worker.

Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)

After a minimum of two years (3,000 hours) of clinical employment with documented supervision, MSW graduates can take a knowledge-based exam and become an LCSW. LCSW credentials are **required** to engage in clinical practice like diagnosing and treating mental health disorders.

Licensed Clinical Social Worker Associate (LCSWA)

You may see a candidate with an LCSWA license, which means they are an MSW graduate and have permission from the licensing board to engage in clinical practice under supervision, but they do not yet have the 3,000 hours of experience needed to become an LCSW.