

The profession of genetic counseling is currently undergoing sunrise review by DORA (Department of Regulatory Agencies) to determine if regulation of the profession is appropriate. DORA's core mission is consumer protection.

Licensure of genetic counselors in the state of Colorado is critical in order to protect the public from harm.

Potential harms:

- Patients and their relatives make critical life decisions (e.g. testing, surgeries, medical treatment, health surveillance, reproductive) based on the information provided by genetic counselors.
- Licensure of genetic counselors will protect the public by ensuring that professionals providing these services are qualified to do so.
- Licensure affords a legal mechanism for complaints of incompetent, unethical and/or unlawful behavior by a genetic counselor to be formally investigated and for placement of sanctions or revocation of the genetic counselor's license if these offenses are proven.
- Colorado should be proactive in affording this protection to the public, as 22 other states, including several in our immediate referral region (Utah, New Mexico, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota) have already done.

Increased complexity:

- Thousands of new genetic tests have been developed in recent years and technologies are changing rapidly. Many of these tests are complex and the results are often not straightforward for patients or healthcare professionals to understand.
- Incorrect test selection or interpretation of genetic test results can lead to errors in medical care/surgical treatment, missed opportunities to provide early screening or treatment for disease, and incorrect understanding of inheritance patterns and the resulting chances of disease occurrence or recurrence.
- Licensure of genetic counselors will ensure that patients and their healthcare providers can identify a qualified professional who will select the right genetic tests, provide proper informed consent, and ensure that test results are properly understood and appropriately used for subsequent decision-making.

Access to services:

- New advances in genetics are announced every week. Genetic testing is rapidly expanding into most medical specialties. Results of these tests guide care for pediatric and adult patients with cancer, neurological disorders, heart conditions and hundreds of other health problems.

- Clinics offering “personalized” or “precision” medicine are being developed to help ensure that patients receive the best treatment and prevention approaches individualized to their genetic make-up, and that potentially harmful or ineffective treatments are avoided.
- The number of physicians in Colorado with specific training and certification in medical genetics is small and wait times for appointments are often long. They and other healthcare professionals increasingly depend upon genetic counselors to provide quality genetic services.
- Licensure of genetic counselors will allow independent practice by genetic counselors within their scope, expanding access to genetic counseling services in hospitals, clinics and other healthcare settings as demand for genetic services continue to increase.
- Licensure will also require that genetic counselors act within their scope of practice and refer appropriate patients to a qualified physician for further discussion of medical evaluation or treatment. This helps ensure a quality, comprehensive healthcare approach for patients.

Employers’ ability to identify qualified providers:

- As the demand for genetic counseling services continues to increase, hospitals and other employers must be able to identify and hire qualified providers.
- Currently, there is no legal requirement in Colorado for genetic counselors to graduate from an accredited training program, obtain board certification or participate in continuing professional education in this rapidly evolving field.
- Currently, a genetic counselor whose board certification is revoked can still practice in Colorado.
- Licensure of genetic counselors will assure that employers can recognize, hire, and, as appropriate, provide staff credentials to qualified providers.

Title protection:

- Licensure of genetic counselors will legally define who can call themselves a genetic counselor. It ensures that only individuals who meet recognized standards for education, board certification and continuing professional education may use the title genetic counselor.
- While the title “genetic counselor” would be limited to those licensed under the Genetic Counselor Licensure Act, it would not restrict physicians or other licensed professionals from the provision of genetic services if the service falls within their own scope of practice.