

Addiction Counselor

Sit with people at the worst point of their lives and help them get out. You can start this one without a degree.

TYPICAL PAY

\$59,350

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$39k to \$98k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

1 to 6 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Treatment centers, outpatient clinics, hospitals, jails and prisons,...

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Psychology, biology and English. Volunteer or work at a shelter, crisis line or youth program to find out whether this work suits you.
- 2 Get a support role** 0 to 1 year
Recovery support specialist, behavioral health technician, residential aide. Paid, and it starts your supervised hours.
- 3 Addiction specific education** 1 to 2 years, often part time
The entry credential from IC&RC (the International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium) requires 300 hours of education in the counselor domains, including six hours of ethics. Community colleges run exactly these courses.
- 4 Supervised hours and work experience** 1 to 3 years
The number depends on your education: about 300 supervised hours with a high school diploma, falling to around 100 with a master's, plus 2,000 to 6,000 hours of work experience.
- 5 Exam and state certification** Months
Pass the credentialing exam and register with your state board. A master's degree later opens full clinical licensure.

Pros and cons

- + You can enter with a high school diploma and get paid while you train
- + Demand is rated much faster than average
- + Work exists in every town, not just big cities
- Pay is low for the emotional weight of the work
- Clients relapse, and some of them die
- Heavy paperwork and insurance documentation

Good to know

988 is the national crisis line

SAMHSA (the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) runs the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Anyone in the United States can call or text those three digits. Counselors work at e...

You can start with a high school diploma

The entry counselor credential used by many state boards asks for a high school diploma plus 300 hours of addiction specific education. Almost no other health career with this pay opens that door.

Optional boosts

Advanced Alcohol and Drug Counselor. Clinical supervisor credential. Licensed professional counselor or clinical social worker. Co-occurring disorders.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Substance Abuse and Behavioral Disorder Counselors (21-1011.00)

O*NET OnLine: Substance Abuse and Behavioral Disorder Counselors

International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium: credentials

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/addiction-counselor>



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