



MPA Master's Level Psychology Panel Q&A Recap

July 23, 2025

Panelists: Lynn F. Bufka, PhD, ABPP, Catherine L. Grus, Ph.D., Syretta R. James, PhD, ABPP

1. Question:

A number of states already allow licensure with an M.A. degree. Is there any research comparing the clinical outcomes of master's vs. doctoral-level providers?
Is there a possibility that APA/MPA will eventually allow master's level clinicians to practice independently?

Will people such as psychology associates in Maryland be grandfathered in?

Answer:

- Limited research compares clinical outcomes between master's- and doctoral-level providers, and what exists generally finds no significant differences in effectiveness.
- APA's Model Licensure Act provides a framework that could support master's-level independent practice in states that choose to adopt it, but in Maryland, no legislative or regulatory changes are currently planned to allow master's-level psychologists to practice independently.
- If Maryland were to adopt master's-level licensure, whether psychology associates or other master's-trained professionals would be grandfathered in would depend on the specific provisions of any future legislation.

2. Question:

What are APA's national standards for master's programs?

Answer:

- APA's Council of Representatives voted in 2018 to begin accrediting master's health service psychology programs.
- Accreditation standards were approved in 2021, with the first programs accredited in 2024.
 - [Standards of Accreditation for Health Service Psychology: Master's Programs](#)
- There remains significant inconsistency across the U.S. regarding the scope of practice for master's-trained professionals.

3. Question:

If master's level clinicians are licensed independently, will that reduce insurance reimbursement for doctoral-level psychologists?

Answer:

- In some states, master's- and doctoral-level providers receive the same reimbursement for equivalent services, while in others, master's-level rates are lower.
 - The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) currently reimburses doctoral-level providers at higher rates than master's-level providers.
 - APA supports maintaining this differential to reflect differences in training and experience.
 - Overall, reimbursement rates across behavioral healthcare remain too low.
 - Expanding master's-level licensure could shift the distribution of responsibilities between master's- and doctoral-level clinicians.
-

4. Question:

How does licensure work for internationally educated psychologists who currently practice as psychology associates?

Answer:

- Demonstrating that international training meets U.S. licensure requirements can be challenging.
 - Work directly with your state licensing board to understand specific requirements.
 - Utilize resources and guidance from professional associations, such as MPA.
 - Consider forming or joining peer support groups for advice and shared experiences.
-

5. Question:

What are the implications of APA vs. MPCAC accreditation for licensure?

Answer:

- Both APA (doctoral programs) and MPCAC (master's/professional programs) are recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), a private organization.
 - <https://www.apa.org/ed/governance/bea/final-report.pdf>
- Doctoral-level licensure (Licensed Psychologist in Maryland):
 - APA-accredited programs generally meet the educational requirements.
 - MPCAC-accredited programs do not qualify, as a doctoral degree is required
- Master's-level licensure (Psychology Associate in Maryland):
 - MPCAC-accredited programs may qualify graduates for licensure.
 - APA-accredited master's programs may also qualify depending on program specifics.
- Graduating from APA or MPCAC programs generally ensures eligibility for licensure in most states, but requirements vary by state and degree level.

- Always verify state-specific rules, as some states may have stricter standards or preference for APA accreditation for certain licenses.
-

6. Question:

Where does Maryland currently stand on this issue? Is there a projected timeline for change? Will existing professionals be grandfathered in?

Answer:

- Maryland does not license master's-level psychologists; licensure is limited to the doctoral level, with master's-trained professionals working in other licensed roles.
 - No formal legislative proposals or timelines for adopting master's-level licensure currently exist in Maryland.
 - Any future grandfathering provisions would be determined by Maryland law if master's-level licensure were pursued.
 - APA supports each state's choice in developing licensure models using APA and ASPPB language.
-

7. Question:

Are there differences between PsyD and PhD preparation that factor into the master's level licensure conversation?

Answer:

- The task force does not distinguish between PsyD and PhD—both are considered doctoral-level training.
 - The primary distinction is between master's- and doctoral-level education, training, and practice.
-

8. Question:

How will changes to the APA's Model Licensure Act affect NASP-certified school psychologists?

Answer:

- NASP-certified school psychologists work under credentials from the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), so the APA's Model Licensure Act changes would not affect their ability to practice in schools.
 - Maryland does not currently license specialist-level school psychologists for independent practice outside schools; only doctoral-level psychologists can obtain licensure from the Maryland Board of Examiners of Psychologists.
 - Any change to allow broader licensure would require new state legislation or regulatory changes, and Maryland has not announced plans to adopt the APA's updated model.
-

9. Question:

If master's level psychologists will eventually do the same work as doctoral-level clinicians but with fewer years of training, why pursue a PhD?

Answer:

- A PhD provides more in-depth training in complex assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of diverse or severe psychological conditions.
- Doctoral-level licensure allows for full independent practice, while master's-level licensure (e.g., Psychology Associate in Maryland) typically comes with supervision or scope limitations.
- Doctoral training prepares clinicians to supervise master's-level providers, lead clinical teams, and take on administrative or policy roles.
- PhD programs emphasize research, giving graduates the skills to contribute to evidence-based practice, pursue academic careers, or engage in program evaluation.
- Doctoral credentials carry greater recognition in the field, among peers, employers, and insurance providers, which can influence reimbursement and referral networks.
- A PhD opens doors to specialty practice areas, teaching, consulting, or higher-level policy involvement that may be less accessible with only a master's degree.
- Many payers differentiate between master's- and doctoral-level clinicians, often providing higher reimbursement rates for doctoral-level services.

References:

- [APA Health Service Psychology Workforce Optimization: A Strategic Response to National Need](#)
- [APA moves step closer to accrediting master's programs in health service psychology](#)
- [2024 APA Accredited Master-s Programs.pdf](#)