

Certification for Life Care Planning Practice

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Abstract

Options for certification in life care planning are presented, with attention to educational and professional practice eligibility requirements for each. Characteristics of the certification processes for the Certified Life Care Planner (CLCP) and its companion Canadian Certified Life Care Planner (CCLCP) credential, the Certified Nurse Life Care Planner (CNLCP) credential, and the Certified Physician Life Care Planner (CPLCP) credential are described.

Keywords: life care planning, certification, credentials, professional practice, qualified health professional, certified life care planner

The path to developing certification in life care planning was driven by the need for accountability and protection (May, 2002; Weed, 2004). Due in part to demand within legal settings for experts who were knowledgeable about complex consequences of disabilities, and the importance of those experts' testimonies, providing evidence of qualification for life care planning practice was critical (Gonzales & Zotovas, 2014; May, 2002; Thomas, 2002). As with most certifications or licenses, the requisite knowledge to obtain the certification or license shows the minimum baseline required for the specialty area. Professionals involved in the service delivery specialty of life care planning should be aware of currently available certification options specific to life care planning, and the distinctions among those certifications. This article provides information about each certification, including the eligibility requirements for each.

Need for Certification

Most professions in health care offer licensure or certification specific to the nature of the field. Examples include physicians, nurses, rehabilitation counselors, mental health counselors, occupational therapists, etc.. Health care professionals may be required to (or will choose to) seek licensure or certification to provide evidence of their knowledge and competency through the initial licensure or certification examination and subsequent renewal processes. Usually, professional licensure is mandated by the laws of the state governing practice of an individual's profession in that state, while certification is a national, voluntary process to demonstrate specialized knowledge in a particular area of practice. Licensing or certifying bodies are usually run by

governing boards composed primarily of professionals with the background, knowledge, skills, and expertise necessary for that specific field. Those professionals typically are responsible for developing the initial examination, establishing the standards of practice, deeming what are acceptable and relevant Continuing Education units (CEUs) to maintain the certification or license, and overseeing the application process by the professional seeking that license or certification.

One expanding area of health care provided by various members of health care professions is that of life care planning. Given the variety of practitioner backgrounds and the transdisciplinary nature of life care planning, a way to ensure accountability, adherence to ethical standards of practice, and assurance of education, training, and knowledge was needed (May, 2002; Miller, 2012; Preston & Reid, 2015).

Certification in life care planning is one of the newer certifications in health care. Although certification is optional, seeking and obtaining certification is important for several reasons (Gonzales & Zotovas, 2014; May, 2002; Miller, 2012). Gonzales and Zotovas (2014) remarked that "benefits of certification include education in regard to life care planning methodologies, generally accepted standards, ethics, and best practices, including familiarization with legal procedures, and legal and administrative workflows" (p. 186). Without certification, a life care planner's qualifications, knowledge, and skills were just presumed to be sufficient (Thomas, 2002; Weed, 2004). In legal proceedings, where such a presumption might not be acceptable, certification in life care planning provides evidence of a professional's relevant education, knowledge, experience, and training in life care planning (Gonzales & Zotovas, 2014; May, 2002; Thomas, 2002; Weed, 2004; Witty, 2018). The International Commission on Health Care Certification (ICHCC, 2019a) was the first governing body of the certification of life care planners, and stated that the Certified Life Care Planner (CLCP) credential was "designed to measure a candidate's working knowledge of medical systems, associated disabilities, and treatment and/or maintenance protocol(s) required for an individual with a catastrophic disability to sustain life within an acceptable comfort level" (ICHCC 2019a, para 2). The ICHCC (2019b) also states in their Certified Life Care Planner Candidate Handbook that certification in life care planning is important "in major part due to the litigious nature of this specialized

health care delivery service and the need to protect the consumer of services” (p. 5).

Educational Options

The ICHCC requires 120 hours of education and training in life care planning to be eligible to sit for the certification exam. According to the ICHCC website (<https://ichcc.org>), there are three precertification education programs in life care planning that are approved by the ICHCC: Institute on Rehabilitation Education and Training (IRET), Capital University Law School, and FIG Services, Inc. These programs provide qualified health care professionals the course work and training that is required to be able to sit for ICHCC’s Certified Life Care Planner certification exam. Key components of these education programs include coursework in life care planning methodology (at least 16 hours), a course in catastrophic case management, a course in vocational rehabilitation, a legal component in life care planning with an onsite or trial experience, and writing a sample life care plan. The Institute on Rehabilitation Education and Training (IRET, 2019) evolved from the original life care planning training program formerly offered by the University of Florida. Their program outline and contact information can be found through their website at <https://iretprograms.com>. Likewise, the programs at Capital University Law School and FIG services, Inc., provide contact information and overviews of their respective programs on their websites: Capital University Law School at <https://law.capital.edu/LifeCarePlannerProgram/> and FIG Services, Inc. at <https://www.figneducation.com>. Each of these three training programs provide at least 120 hours of training designed to satisfy ICHCC’s educational requirements for the CLCP credential. Each provides the majority of the training online, with one intensive on-campus (or virtual) face-to-face module.

Certification Options

In addition to the ICHCC’s CLCP (and its companion Canadian Certified Life Care Planner, [CCLCP]) credential, two other certifications in life care planning are now available. The American Academy of Nurse Life Care Planners (AANLCP, 2019) developed the Certified Nurse Life Care Planner (CNLCP) credential (CNLCP Certification Board, 2019a). The American Academy of Physician Life Care Planners (AAPLCP) developed the Certified Physician Life Care Planner (CPLCP) credential (CPLCP Certification Board, 2016a). The particular certification(s) an individual chooses to pursue depends in part on that individual’s professional standing and the capacity in which s/he serves (Johnson, Lacerte, & Fountaine, 2015; Miller, 2012; Rice, Hicks, & Wiehe, 2000). For each specific life care planning certification, there are certain eligibility criteria that must be met (Gonzales & Zotovas, 2014; Rice et al., 2000; Thomas, 2002).

People interested in seeking certification in life care

planning should know about the eligibility requirements, costs associated with becoming certified, and how to contact the certification bodies. Other stakeholders who seek to use the services of a life care planner may be interested in differences among these certifications. The following section addresses commonly asked questions regarding life care planning certifications. Each certifying body’s responses to those questions are provided for comparison. Each question was posed to administrators for each respective certifying body. For some questions, the administrators directed authors of this article to their websites or handbooks for answers. For questions that could not be answered through information publicly available in these resources, the administrators provided direct answers. When information was not clear in these sources, the authors consulted other published literature and/or sought further clarification from the administrators. NOTE: The authors of this article advise anyone interested in seeking certification contact the certifying bodies directly for updated information.

For each of the following questions, answers are presented for the ICHCC (CLCP certification), CNLCP Certification Board (CNLCP certification), and CPLCP Certification Board (CPLCP certification), based on their respective administrator’s responses, websites, or handbooks available.

Question: What is the name of this certification?

CLCP Certification response:

The ICHCC offers the Certified Life Care Planner (CLCP) and the Canadian Certified Life Care Planner (CCLCP) certifications for life care planning (ICHCC 2019a, 2019b).

CNLCP Certification response:

The Certified Nurse Life Care Planning Certification Board offers the Certified Nurse Life Care Planner (CNLCP) certification for life care planning (CNLCP Certification Board, 2019a, 2019b).

CPLCP Certification response:

The Certified Physician Life Care Planning Certification Board offers the Certified Physician Life Care Planner (CPLCP) certification for life care planning (CPLCP Certification Board, 2019a, 2019b).

Question: What is the name and contact information for the certifying body offering this certification?

CLCP Certification response:

International Commission on Health Care Certification (ICHCC)

13801 Village Mill Drive, Suite 103

Midlothian, VA 23114

Phone: (804) 378-7273

Fax: (804) 378-7267

Website: ICHCC.org

Dr. V. Robert May III, President

Kathleen Kenney May, Administrator (personal

communication, K. May, July 9, 2019)

CNLCP Certification response:

CNLCP Certification Board
P. O. Box 3311
Concord, NH 03002-3311
Phone: (626) 351-0991 ext. 216
Website: cnlcp.org
Jan Roughan, Chairperson (personal communication, L. Vallejo, July 29, 2019).

CPLCP Certification response:

CPLCP Certification Board
5501 Balcones Drive, A-202
Austin, TX 78731
Phone: (866) 445-8579
Email: info@aaplcp.org
Website: aaplcp.org
William Davenport, Executive Director (personal communication, W. Davenport, July 16, 2019).

Question: When did the certification start?

CLCP Certification response:

The CLCP certification started in 1996 (V. May, 2002).

CNLCP Certification response:

The CNLCP certification started in 1998 (L. Vallejo, personal communication, July 29, 2019).

CPLCP Certification response:

The CPLCP certification started in 2016 (W. L. Davenport, personal communication, July 16, 2019).

Question: How many people are currently certified?

CLCP Certification response:

As of July 2019, there have been approximately 1500 Certified Life Care Planners. Of that number, 1277 are in active status. There have been 194 Canadian CLCPs; 171 of them are currently in active status (K. May, personal communication, July 9, 2019).

CNLCP Certification response:

In July 2019, there were 321 Certified Nurse Life Care Planners (L. Vallejo, personal communication, July 29, 2019). According to statistics posted to the <https://cnlcp.org/certification/> website (CNLCP Certification Board, 2019a, "Statistics" para 1-3), at the end of 2018 there were 327 active CNLCPs; at the end of 2017 there were 345; and at the end of 2016 there were 361.

CPLCP Certification response:

"There are currently only 13 Certified Physician Life Care Planners" (W. Davenport, personal communication, July 16, 2019).

Question: Who is eligible for this certification?

CLCP Certification response:

"Qualified healthcare professionals" are eligible for certification as a Certified Life Care Planner. The designation as qualified healthcare professional "must be specific to the care, treatment, and/or rehabilitation of individuals with significant disabilities" (ICHCC, 2019b, p. 7). Each candidate "must hold a Masters' Degree in a health-related field or meet the minimum academic requirements for their designated health care profession., and be certified, licensed, or meet the legal mandates of the candidate's respective state that allow him or her to practice service delivery within the definition of his or her designated healthcare profession" (ICHCC, 2019b, p. 6).

CNLCP Certification response:

Registered Nurses (RNs) "with a current, unrestricted license, or its equivalent in other countries, for at least the past three years; and, a minimum of two years of full-time paid professional experience in a role that utilizes the nursing process in assessing an individual's long term/lifetime treatment needs and costs across the continuum of care" (CNLCP Certification Board, 2019a).

CPLCP Certification response:

"CPLCP Certification applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Be licensed as a Medical Doctor (MD), or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (OD) in the United States, or the equivalent in other countries, for at least 3 years following the completion of residency. Any license must be currently active, without any restrictions.
2. Be Board Certified in Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (Physiatry) as designated by the American Board of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (ABPMR), or by the American Osteopathic Board of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (AOBPMR).
3. Be a Certified Life Care Planner (CLCP), as designated by the International Commission on Health Care Certification (ICHCC)" (CPLCP Certification Board, 2016a, para 2).

Question: In addition to meeting the professional requirements listed above, what other eligibility criteria must candidates satisfy?

CLCP Certification response:

"Each candidate must have at least 120 hours of post-graduate or post-specialty degree training in life care planning or in areas that can be applied in the development of

a life care plan or pertain to the service delivery applied to life care planning. Each candidate must submit a sample life care plan developed from an assigned scenario to the candidate by the respective training program or by the ICHCC for peer review. There must be 16 hours of training specific to a basic orientation, methodology, and standards of practice in life care planning within the required 120 hours. The 120 hours may be obtained through online training/educational; programs as well as onsite presentations and conferences. Applicants should have a minimum of 3 years of field experience in their designated area of formal training and expertise within the first 5 years preceding application for certification” (ICHCC 2019b, p. 6).

CNLCP Certification response:

Candidates meeting the Registered Nurse and experience criteria must also complete one of two “routes” for obtaining required specialty education or experience specific to life care planning: “**Route 1:** Completion of *120 continuing education units** relating to life care planning or in *equivalent areas* that can be applied to the development of a life care plan, or pertain to the *service delivery* applicable to life care planning, within the five (5) years immediately preceding application.

* There must be a minimum of *10 hours specific to a basic orientation, methodology, and standards of practice* relevant to the nurse life care planning process contained within the continuing education curriculum.

Route 2: Verification* of *two (2) years life care planning experience, or a variant thereof* (e.g., lifetime nurse care planning, etc.), that incorporates the nursing process and skill set inherent to the assessment and determination of treatment needs and their respective costs, across the continuum of care, within the past five years immediately preceding the application.

*Verification must be authenticated by an employer or a minimum of two referral sources” (CNLCP Certification Board, 2019b, p. 2).

CPLCP Certification response:

On the CPLCP website (on page <http://clcp.org/certification.aspx>), a “submission and defense of work product” requirement is listed. Specifically, “Upon the successful completion of the CPLCP™ Examination, the CPLCP™ Certification candidate shall receive from the CPLCP™ Certification Board, an assignment to produce a life care plan which evidences comprehensive conformity to the tenets, methods and best practices of the American Academy of Physician Life Care Planners. The assignment will require the CPLCP™ Certification candidate to produce a life care plan that addresses one of the following diagnostics conditions: brain injury, spinal cord injury, orthopedic injury, amputations, nerve injury, burns, visual or hearing impairment, or pulmonary or gastrointestinal

injuries. Upon the CPLCP™ Certification Board’s acceptance of the CPLCP™ Certification candidate’s work product, the CPLCP™ Certification candidate will make an oral presentation of his/her plan to the CPLCP™ Certification Board, during which time the CPLCP™ Certification candidate will be required to successfully explain and defend his/her plan, its stated opinions, conclusions, method of formulation, etc.

Upon the CPLCP™ Certification Board’s acceptance an of the CPLCP™ Certification candidate’s work product, and the CPLCP™ Certification Board’s approval of the candidate’s presentation and defense of his/her work product, the CPLCP™ Certification candidate will be awarded the CPLCP™ Certification designation” (CLPLCP Certification Board, 2019a, “Submission and Defense of Work Product,” para 1-3).

However, this information seems to be in conflict with what is posted in the CPLCP Handbook for Candidates (CPLCP Certification Board, 2016b), which states that the CPLCP examination is “a computerized examination composed of a maximum of 120 multiple choice questions with a total testing time of three (3) hours” (p. 9) and “Candidates who pass the CPLCP Examination are eligible to use the designation CPLCP after their names and will receive certificates from the CPLCP Certification Board” (p. 2). That handbook does not refer to a requirement for submission and defense of a work product.

Question: What is the initial cost to become certified?

CLCP Certification response:

The Certified Life Care Planner examination application fee is \$445.00. There is usually also a Proctor U fee of \$35.00 (ICHCC 2019b, pp. 20-21).

CNLCP Certification response:

The CNLCP examination fee is \$425.00 for AANLCP association members, and \$525.00 for non-members.

CPLCP Certification response:

The CPLCP examination fee is \$325.00 for AAPLCP association members, and \$475.00 for non-members.

Question: What are the requirements to maintain certification?

CLCP Certification response:

A Certified Life Care Planner (CLCP) or Canadian Certified Life Care Planner (CCLCP) must renew the credential every 5 years for it to remain in active status. A CLCP/CCLCP is required to obtain 80 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) within those 5 years, with a minimum of eight being in the content area of ethics. Retaking (and passing) the certification exam is also an option for recertification (ICHCC 2019b, p. 22).

CNLCP Certification response:

Certification in Nurse Life Care Planning is recognized for a period of 5 years. To renew, the candidate must retake and pass the current certification exam or meet the 60 CEU point requirements at that time (CNLCP Certification Board, 2019b).

CPLCP Certification response:

Certification in Physician Life Care Planning is recognized for five years. According to the CPLCP website, "Candidates for recertification who do not elect to retake the CPLCP Certification Examination and submit to CPLCP Certification Board Review are eligible for recertification with proof of sixty (60) continuing education units, fifteen (15) of which can be CME credits of Psychiatric course work applicable to Physician life care planning" (CPLCP Certification Board, 2016a, "Recertification," para 2-3).

Question: What is the cost to maintain certification?**CLCP Certification response:**

If all of the submitted 80 CEU hours were pre-approved by the ICHCC, the renewal fee is \$350.00. If any of the hours were not pre-approved by the ICHCC, the renewal fee is \$400.00. Recertification by examination is also an option, for a fee of \$445.00 (ICHCC 2019b, p. 22).

CNLCP Certification response:

CNLCP Recertification by continuing education "points" costs \$375.00 for AANLCP association members, and \$475.00 for non-members. Recertification by examination costs \$425.00 for AANLCP association members, and \$525.00 for non-members (CNLCP Certification Board, 2019b, p. 13).

CPLCP Certification response:

The CPLCP website lists fees for "Recertification/Renewal" as \$295.00 for AAPLCP association members, and \$195.00 for non-members (CPLCP Certification Board, 2016a, "Fees," para 2).

Question: Can a practitioner's certification be revoked? If so, how?**CLCP Certification response:**

Yes, the CLCP and CCLCP credentials can be revoked. "The ICHCC reserves the right to revoke or suspend certification if a certification is granted on the basis of false, misleading, or inaccurate information if such information becomes evident upon inquiry. Failure to renew your certification will result in the revocation of your certified status" (ICHCC 2019b, p. 25). In addition, "Certified health care providers who violate the Professional Code of Ethics are subject to disciplinary action" which could include certification suspension or revocation (ICHCC 2019b, p. 27).

CNLCP Certification response:

Yes, the CNLCP credential can be revoked. According to the CNLCP certification handbook (CNLCP Certification Board, 2019b), "A certification may be revoked for the following reasons:

- Falsification of an application;
- Failure to maintain an active, unrestricted RN license throughout the five-year certification period;
- Revocation of an RN license;
- Misrepresentation of certification status;
- Failure to apply for recertification within current CNLCP® Certification Board guidelines" (p. 6).

CPLCP Certification response:

Yes, the CPLCP credential can be revoked. A certification may be suspended or revoked for the following reasons:

- "Falsification of any application or documentation.
- Failure to maintain prerequisite unrestricted medical licensure, and board and other qualifying certifications.
- Failure to renew one's CPLCP recertification within required timeframes.
- Cause of disciplinary action as defined [by the] CPLCP Certification Board resulting from conclusive misconduct on the behalf of any CPLCP certification holder, applicant, or candidate" (CPLCP 2016a, para 1).

Question: Is there a certification exam for this credential? If so, how was it developed and validated?**CLCP Certification response:**

Yes, there is a certification examination for the CLCP and CCLCP credentials. Exam items are based on a role and function (practice analysis) study of life care planners, which identified 16 knowledge domains (ICHCC, 2019b, p. 8). The ICHCC applied the Test Analysis and Validation Program (TAVP) statistical application to examine reliability and validity regarding item content and test-taker responses. The cutoff score was derived using a modified Angoff method, establishing a cutoff score of 79, based on analysis of 208 certification examinations administered during 2011 and through March of 2012 (ICHCC, 2019b, p. 8).

CNLCP Certification response:

Yes, there is a certification examination for the CNLCP credential. "The certification exam for Nurse Life Care Planners is psychometrically validated by a testing company which is a non-partisan entity" (L. Vallejo, personal communication, July 29, 2019).

CPLCP Certification response:

Yes, there is a certification examination for the CPLCP credential. According to the certification handbook for this credential, "The questions for the examination are based upon the tenets, methods and best practices advocated by the

American Academy of Physician Life Care Planners, as well as from other experts with clinical, forensic, health care management and psychiatric expertise and experience in life care planning. Questions are reviewed for construction, accuracy, and appropriateness by the Certified Physician Life Care Planner (CPLCP) Certification Board” (CPLPC Certification Board, 2016b, p. 9).

Question: *Is this certification process accredited by any accrediting body? If so, what is that accrediting body, and when was the accreditation granted?*

CLCP Certification response:

No, the CLCP/CCLCP certification process is not yet accredited (K. May, personal communication, July 9, 2019).

CNLCP Certification response:

No, the CLCP/CCLCP certification process is not yet accredited (L. Vallejo, personal communication, July 29, 2019).

CPLCP Certification response:

No, the CPLCP certification process is not yet accredited (W. Davenport, personal communication, July 16, 2019).

Question: *If this certification process is not yet accredited, are there plans to seek accreditation? If so, from whom will accreditation be requested, and at what point in the process of seeking that accreditation is the organization?*

CLCP Certification response:

“We have been actively investigating and pursuing accreditation. Dr May has met with representatives from the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), to discuss accreditation, the accreditation process as well as which agency best suits the mission and goals of the ICHCC. As the International Commission on Health Care Certification is an international organization, it has been decided to apply for ANSI accreditation as it provides international accreditation. Dr. May has had several meetings concerning the process. The ICHCC is currently in the beginning stages of this application process” (K. May, Personal Communication, July 22, 2019).

CNLCP Certification response:

“CNLCP is currently applying for accreditation through the American Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC)” (CNLCP Certification Board, 2019a, “Accreditation,” para 3).

CPLCP Certification response:

The American Academy of Physician Life Care Planners (AAPLCP) “board has discussed accreditation, and it is something that’s being considered. No other details to offer at this time” (W. Davenport, personal communication, July 16, 2019).

Question: *What else should life care planners, and people who hire life care planners, know about the certification program?*

CLCP Certification response:

ICHCC (K. May, personal communication, July 9, 2019) directed the authors of this article to p.5 of ICHCC’s CLCP Handbook, which includes: “Consumer protection is achieved through the policy structure of the ICHCC such that by obtaining the Certified Life Care Planner credential, the candidate agrees to:

1. be peer reviewed
2. adhere to a set of practice standards and ethical guidelines that are research based
3. be scrutinized by a governing board regarding his or her practice behaviors
4. be disciplined in the event of a finding of fact regarding inappropriate practice behaviors and/or outcomes” (ICHCC 2019b, p. 5).

CNLCP Certification response:

Certification in Nurse Life Care Planning offers “Assurance to employers, the public, and members of the healthcare professions of the existence of a basic requisite level of knowledge in the specialty of nurse life care planning” (CNLCP Certification Board, 2019b, p.1).

CPLCP Certification response:

This certification is “Heavily focused on the methodology advocated by the American Academy of Physician Life Care Planning: <http://www.aaplcp.org/Default.aspx>” (W. Davenport, personal communication, July 16, 2019).

Summary

There are multiple options from which to choose when deciding to seek certification as a life care planner. Some are comparatively restrictive in determining who should be eligible for that certification, limiting their certificants to those who are registered nurses (CNLCP) or physicians (CPLCP). The CNLCP credential allows registered nurses to qualify through either specialized education or relevant experience; the CLCP and CPLCP credentials require specific specialized training, and will not allow experience to substitute for that training. Each of these certification programs require passing a certification examination. Initial certification and renewal fees are relatively comparable across these credentials. Each certification can be maintained through completion of continuing education or through retaking the certification examination. Each certifying body has processes by which the certification can be revoked; the ICHCC details a specific Code of Ethics to which certificants must adhere. Two of the certifying bodies (for the CLCP and CNLCP credentials) report engagement in pursuing accreditation for their credentialing processes. Attainment of such accreditation would bring additional

value to life care planning certification processes. In the meantime, certification by any of these organizations provides evidence that the certificant has a basic level of knowledge about life care planning practice, and has not been adjudicated to have engaged in behavior that could result in loss of that certification. Certifying life care planners is important to the professionalism of life care planning practice.

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