

NADD Accreditation and Certification Programs

Edward Seliger, MA, NADD

With the NADD Accreditation and Certification Programs, NADD, in association with the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disability Services (NASDDDS), has established standards and benchmarks for services provided to individuals who have intellectual and developmental disabilities co-occurring with mental illness. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and mental illness (MI) have complex needs and present clinical challenges to the professionals, programs, and systems that provide care to these individuals. The NADD Accreditation and Certification Programs were developed to raise their level of care, as well as to provide recognition to those programs and professionals offering quality care.

Charles Moseley, Ed.D., former Associate Executive Director for NASDDDS, said,

The NADD Accreditation/Certification Program is an important tool for state agencies, DD and MH, that are interested in expanding their community infrastructure to support people with co-occurring developmental disabilities and mental illnesses....NCI data have consistently documented over the years that approximately 32% of all people receiving DD services have a mental illness. The NADD Accreditation/Certification Program offers an important tool to states and providers interested in improving their efforts to serve this group of individuals.

The NADD Accreditation and Certification Programs are composed of four interrelated programs: Accreditation for programs, Competency-Based Clinical Certification, Competency-Based Dual Diagnosis Specialist Certification, and Competency-Based Direct Support Professional Certification.

The NADD Accreditation Program

NADD developed the NADD Accreditation Program to improve the quality and effectiveness of services provided to individuals with a dual diagnosis through the development of competency-based professional standards and through promoting ongoing professional and program development. NADD offers accreditation of programs serving individuals with a dual diagnosis, rather than the agency or organization that offers these programs.

A NADD Accreditation survey evaluates a program on the basis of eighteen competency modules:

- Medication Reconciliation
- Holistic Bio-Psycho-Social Approach
- Database/Outcome measures

- Protocols for Assessments
- Treatment/Habilitation Plans
- Basic Health Care
- Interdisciplinary Team
- Training / staff and family
- Crisis Prevention and Intervention
- Cultural Competency/Family Values
- Trauma
- Quality Assurance/Incident Management
- Evidence-Based Treatment Practices
- Ethics, Rights, Responsibilities
- Interagency and Cross-Systems Collaborations
- Long Term Living – Service Coordination
- Advocacy and Rights Health Informatics (Technology)

(Note: Only the standards that are applicable to the program will be evaluated.)

Details about these competency areas and what the NADD accreditation surveyors look for is available in the Accreditation Program Manual, which is available on the NADD website.

The Accreditation survey includes (1) interviews, (2) records review, and (3) policy and procedure review. The NADD surveyor(s) have face-to-face interviews with treatment team members, other staff involved in treatment of the individual, and program administrators. The NADD surveyors complete a records review and interview of the treatment team members on specific cases to ensure clear documentation that reflects the individualized goals of treatment plan as well as direct observation of the staff and persons receiving services. The NADD surveyor(s) review and assess whether the program practices reflect the best practice as established by the NADD accreditation standards.

One way that NADD Accreditation differs from almost all other accreditation programs is the inclusion of a consultation component. Through their expertise, NADD surveyors are not only able to identify areas that are in need of improvement, but they are also able to offer concrete suggestions about how to improve the program. The consultation component takes place on site during the course of the survey.

Hugh M. Sage, PhD, Executive Director of Liberty of Oklahoma Corporation/Robert M. Greer Center in Enid, OK, the first program to receive NADD Accreditation, noted,

When NADD made its accreditation program available...we realized that objective evidence of compliance with those additional standards would be ideally suited to attest to the appropriateness and efficacy of Liberty's clinical and related practices for our highly specialized client population. And, in fact, our NADD survey...produced a number of helpful recommendations for strengthening our program.

After completion of the accreditation survey, NADD makes a determination about granting accreditation. The decision may be to grant accreditation for three years, two years, one year

(provisional accreditation), or to deny accreditation. Programs which receive accreditation or provisional accreditation receive a certificate.

Competency-Based Clinical Certification Program

The NADD Competency-Based Clinical Certification was developed to improve the quality and effectiveness of services provided to individuals with a dual diagnosis through the development of competency-based professional standards and through promoting ongoing professional development. Certification attests to the clinician's competency in providing services to individuals with a dual diagnosis.

NADD has identified five competency areas that applicants for Clinical Certification must demonstrate mastery of.

- Positive Behavior Supports and Effective Environment
- Psychotherapy
- Psychopharmacology
- Assessment of Medical Conditions
- Assessment

The NADD Competency-Based Clinical Certification Program Manual, available on the NADD website, lists benchmarks and performance indicators for these competency areas.

In order to be considered for Clinical Certification, an applicant must meet certain pre-requisites. They must have one of the following licenses in the USA or Canada (equivalent accepted): state/province license, i.e. Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D. Psychologist; state/province license, BCBA, or governing body recognition as an Applied Behavior Analyst; State/province license as a Physician, M.D., D.O., MBBS, or equivalent; state/province license as a Master's level Mental Health Counselor, Marriage & Family Counselor, Addictions Counselor; state/province license as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker; state/province license as a Physician's Assistant, Advanced Practice RN, or Nurse Practitioner (or clinical equivalent); or other similar credentialing; equivalent determination resides with the NADD Competency-Based Certification Program. Professionals with a Master's level in a related field or RNs are eligible with additional experience and a thorough explanation of the experience base. The applicant must have 5 years experience in support of persons with intellectual disabilities and mental health issues. This can include internships and externships. For applicants with a Master's degree in a related field and for RNs, 7 years is required.

Applicants are required to submit a work sample and then participate in a telephone-based interview/exam. The applicant is presented with a case vignette approximately 24-48 hours before the interview, about which he or she will be asked to verbally offer his/her thoughts and reflections (i.e., provide a case formulation and treatment plan). The interview also includes resolution of any questions raised during other parts of the application process.

Clinicians who receive NADD Clinical Certification are entitled to use "NADD-CC" as a credential.

The NADD-CC is being recognized by a wider and wider variety of different entities as a unique specialty, and we anticipate broader recognition as time passes. Individual municipalities such as the City of Philadelphia recognize the NADD-CC, giving specific preference in a Request For Proposals. Some third party payers, including managed care entities, recognize NADD-CC. Individual states, such as MN and NJ, recognize NADD-CC and are in the process of adopting NADD-CC into service qualifications and job class specifications.

One NADD Certified Clinician, Alyse Kerr, MS, NCC, LPC, NADD-CC, said,

The NADD competency-based clinical certification has provided me with an avenue to verify a dual diagnosis specialty. My ability to provide clinical supports to individuals supported both by medical assistance and private insurances has been expanded by allowing me to gain access to closed insurance networks. These networks had been closed to me prior to receiving this certification, allowing this population to remain largely unserved outside of community mental health centers.

As she observed in an article published in the July-August 2013 *NADD Bulletin*, thanks in part to her NADD Clinical Certification, she is now able to put together services that might not otherwise be available to individuals diagnosed with an intellectual/developmental disability who have mental health needs.

Competency-Based Dual Diagnosis Specialist Certification

The NADD Competency-Based Dual Diagnosis Specialist Certification Program is designed for specialists in the field of dual diagnosis who deliver, manage, train and/or supervise services for persons with intellectual/developmental disabilities and mental health needs. Staff working in units of county, state or provincial government, QIDPs, RN's, LPN's, program directors, program supervisors, case/care managers, program specialists, supports coordinators, peer specialists, trainers, and others are examples of roles that can apply for this certification.

The specialist seeking certification is required to demonstrate mastery of the following six competency areas:

1. Multimodal bio-psycho-social approach
2. Application of emerging best practices
3. Knowledge of therapeutic constructs
4. Respectful and effective communication
5. Knowledge of dual role service delivery & fiduciary responsibilities
6. Ability to apply administrative critical thinking

The NADD Competency-Based Dual Diagnosis Specialist Certification Program Manual, which is available on the NADD website, lists benchmarks and performance indicators for these competency areas.

As in the Clinical Certification application process, once a candidate has been determined to meet the pre-requisites for Dual Diagnosis Specialist Certification, he or she is asked to submit a work sample. The instructions for submitting the work sample reflect the various job roles included within Dual Diagnosis Specialist Certification. For example, the way that an administrator is asked to demonstrate ability to communicate effectively will be different from the way that a case manager or support coordinator would be asked to demonstrate the same competency. Through answering a series of questions, the work sample should demonstrate mastery of each of the competency areas.

The interview/exam, which is conducted telephonically, includes discussion of applicant's training and experience in dual diagnosis, jobs, position, program; review of capacity and work with (or support of) individuals with dual diagnosis; discussion of one project/program/service plan/training that involves dual diagnosis; discussion of change in the life (or lives) of a person with dual diagnosis; discussion of systemic change where the candidate works; discussion of work sample and resolution of specific questions arising from application materials. Candidates can expect the interview to include additional topics or areas that are consistent with current practice. Some topics might include: self-determination, consumer decision-making/problem solving, person-centered planning, assessment, financial implications, operational structure, etc.

Specialists who receive NADD certification are entitled to use "NADD-DDS" as a credential.

Susan Morris, MSW, RSW, NADD-DDS, commenting on the benefits of the process of applying for Dual Diagnosis Specialist Certification, said,

Overall it was a very good experience in two ways. The first was the opportunity it gave me to connect with my references and discuss my work with them in a way that I had not done before. This was particularly true with the family reference – as most of our conversations in the past had understandably been oriented toward their situation and broader issues. They were delighted to be able to have the opportunity to support my professional development. The writing of the work sample required me to also think in a different way (e.g., about communication, programmatic, and inter-system issues) as they applied to a particular area. This provided me with a fresh perspective on work that I had been doing for a number of years. While the time that such endeavors require is always hard to set aside, I feel quite proud of this accomplishment.

Competency-Based Direct Support Professional Certification

In general, DSPs spend more time with the person with IDD/MI than any other professional. The competence of the DSP can make a big difference in the quality of life for people. DSPs are often the ones charged with supporting skill building. They help the person engage in recommended therapies on a day-to-day basis. This work requires an advanced level of skill and knowledge to do well. However, there is little available to guide DSPs and others in identifying the specific competencies a DSP should have for this work. As a result, many DSPs are under-qualified. Too often, they lack the support and training to do well. This lack of standards can make finding, hiring, training, and retaining qualified DSPs difficult. As a result, many people with IDD/MI do not have adequate daily support.

The NADD Competency-Based Direct Support Professional Certification is a program to certify the competency of DSPs who support people with a dual diagnosis. DSP competency-based certification validates and provides assurance to individuals served, colleagues, and employers that a direct support professional has met the standards established by NADD for providing services to individuals with IDD/MI.

NADD identified five competency areas that the DSP applicant must demonstrate competency in:

1. Assessment and Observation
2. Behavior Support
3. Crisis Prevention and Intervention
4. Health and Wellness
5. Community Collaboration and Teamwork

The NADD Competency-Based Direct Support Professional Certification Program Manual, available on the NADD website, provides benchmarks and performance indicators for these competencies.

In order to be considered for certification, the applicant must meet the following pre-requisites: (1) must have worked as a DSP in the developmental disability or mental health field for at least one calendar year and must have completed 1000 hours of direct support work; (2) must be an employee in good standing; and (3) must sign the Code of Ethics.

To demonstrate competency, the candidate takes an online multiple choice test and must achieve an overall score of at least 80% while the score for each of the competency areas must be at least 60%.

Direct Support Professionals who receive NADD DSP certification are entitled to use “NADD-DSP” as a credential.

Mischa B. Staton, NADD-DSP, from Meridian Health Services’ Connxxions program said,

The NADD-DSP certification has allowed me to validate my dedication to provide the best service possible. Clients, families, and community partners are so grateful to learn about the process and know I am committed to upholding professional standards.

Trainings

To assist candidates to prepare for applying for accreditation or certification, NADD is developing a number of web-based trainings. These trainings will not be required, but are intended to assist those candidates who feel they would benefit from the additional training. There will be training modules for each of the competency areas for each type of certification. Candidates will have the option to participate in as many of these trainings as they choose.

Live trainings in a couple of Dual Diagnosis Specialist modules have been offered several times.

For further information, contact Edward Seliger at eseliger@thenadd.org.