

Certified Wellness Coach Profession HCAI-Designated Education Program Development

February 21, 2025



The HCAi Vision

Every Californian should have access to equitable, affordable, quality health care provided in a safe environment by a diverse workforce — guided by health information that improves outcomes for all.

As California's health care needs expand, HCAI is now responsible for managing an array of programs that grew substantially in this year's budget, including new areas of workforce development.



The Need for Certified Wellness Coaches

The Children and Youth Behavioral Health Initiative (CYBHI) is part of the **Master Plan for Kids' Mental Health**, a historic investment by the State of California that takes a “whole child” approach to **address the factors that contribute to the mental health and well-being of our children and youth.**

As part of that funding and plan, **HCAI was tasked to design and implement the Certified Wellness Coach (CWC) workforce.**

HCAI Certified Wellness Coach Profession Overview

Purpose

1. Create **supply** of competent and skilled CWC workforce that is representative of the populations they serve and available in underserved communities.
2. Generate **demand** for CWCs employed in a variety of settings, including public-education, community-based organizations, and health centers.



The CWC role is designed to:



Increase overall capacity for delivering behavioral health services to children and youth.



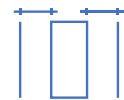
Serve vulnerable children and youth where they are.



Engage directly with children and youth through age 25.



Build a public behavioral health workforce that better represents the diversity of California's children & youth.



Fill workforce gaps that exist today.



Ensure the role is both a desirable occupation and a stepping-stone to more advanced roles.

Minimum Education Level Required

Illustrative Behavioral Health Lattice with Example Behavioral Health Roles

Supervised Professional

Certificate	Other non-BH roles	Community health worker	Peer support	SUD counselor
Associates	Certified Wellness Coach I			
Bachelors	Certified Wellness Coach II	Social worker		
Masters	School counselor, school psychologist, social worker, or individuals working towards licensure (incl. PPS)			

Independent Practitioner

Licensure	Licensed clinicians, school nurse, educational psychologists (incl. PPS)	
PhD	Psychologist (incl. PPS)	
MD	Psychiatrist, primary care providers	

Behavioral Health Career Lattice

Select Observations

- The Certified Wellness Coach role is designed to be an additional opportunity in the lattice, **bridging the gap between roles** with minimum to no training to Master's-level training.
- The Certified Wellness Coach role **offers employment and training to those that want to advance their careers** to higher levels of the career lattice.

Certification Requirements – Education Pathway

	Wellness Coach I	Wellness Coach II
Intended for	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals interested in entering the behavioral health field	
Degree Required	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Associates degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bachelor's degree
Majors Accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social Work• Human Services• Addiction Studies• Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social Work• Human Services• Addiction Studies• Psychology
Field Experience Needed¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 400 hours total (150 hour minimum) <p>Experience must be providing direct pre-clinical behavioral health services to clients in school-linked/school-based organizations, non-profits, community organizations, and/or health centers/clinics within the last six years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 800 hours total (300 hour minimum)²

1. Any hours not completed during the degree program can be completed post-graduation via relevant internship, volunteer, or work experience. 2. Hours from Wellness Coach I certification apply towards total.

Services and Competencies of the Certified Wellness Coach

Services

Activities core to the Certified Wellness Coach roles

- 1 Wellness promotion and education
- 2 Screening
- 3 Care coordination and extension
- 4 Individual support
- 5 Group support
- 6 Crisis referral

Additional Competencies

Demonstrated areas of knowledge to be evaluated against during field experience

- 7 Cultural responsiveness, humility, and mitigating implicit bias
- 8 Professionalism, ethics, and legal mandates
- 9 Communication
- 10 Operating in role and different environments

K-12 Pathway Opportunities

- Clear and tangible educational and career pathway for students interested in working in the mental health field.
- Education
 - Dual enrollment with Social Work and Human Service and other related programs decreasing degree completion time to reach eligibility for state certification
 - Clear educational path from high school through master's degree
 - HCAI Behavioral Health scholarships from certificate to degrees
- Career experience through work-based learning
 - Integrating work-based learning while supporting the social emotional needs of students
 - Students can gain foundational learning on core services that Wellness Coaches provide via work-based learning related to high school Wellness Centers, peer programs, service learning, and other student related wellness promotion activities

The Need for Wellness Coaches

- **Mental Health Continuum:** There is a shortage of providers in the primary prevention and early intervention space
- **MH Providers:** Clinical providers are overburdened and aren't able to operate at the top of their license
- **Labor Demand:** There is interest in entry level behavioral health support for children and youth
 - NASW
 - CADD
 - CBOs
 - School Districts
 - Faculty
 - Students

Why Should You Participate?

The Wellness Coach model designed by the California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) is to “**Build a public behavioral health workforce that better represents the diversity of California’s children and youth**”.²

California’s Community Colleges are positioned to meet workforce gaps and career advancement:

- Serve the largest and most diverse student body. In the 2018-19 academic year, sixty-nine percent (69%) of the 1.9 million students enrolled in California Community Colleges are people of diverse ethnic backgrounds.
- Nearly 80,000 community college students transfer to UC or CSU each year while learning the skills and education needed to secure “good-paying jobs”.³

Establishing **pipeline/pathway opportunities** between LEAs and community colleges increases access to educational and employment opportunities.

2. Based on the California Department of Health Care Access and Information *Wellness Coach Model, Dec. 2023*.

3. Bases on California Community Colleges, State of the System page.

4. Based on *The Economic Value of the California Community College System*, Emsi Burning Glass, 2022.

Designation Process and Support

Collaborative Support

HCAI is partnering with the Foundation for California Community Colleges (FoundationCCC) to administer and manage grant funds up to \$200,000 per program to support the development of designated education programs.

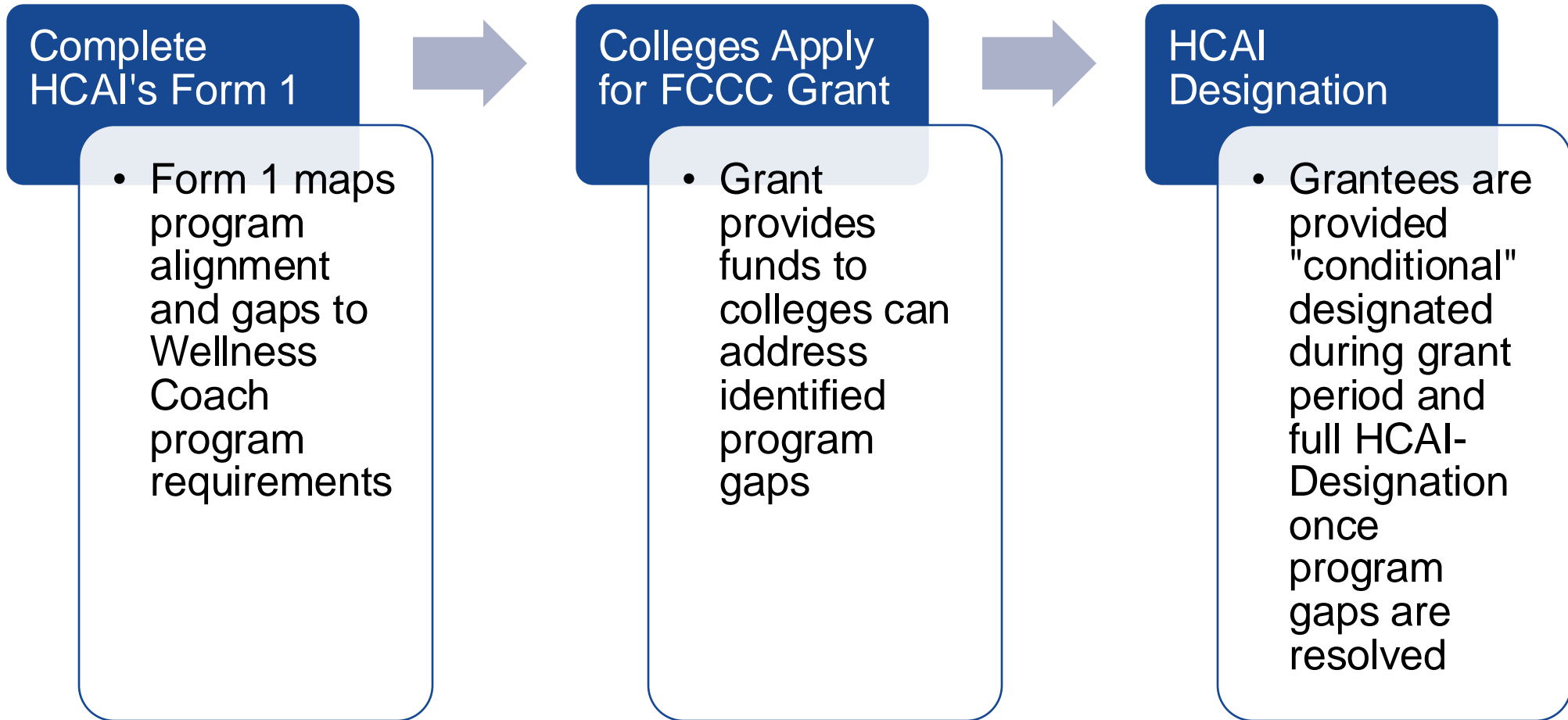
Connect with FoundationCCC

- Reach out to wellnesscoach@foundationccc.org
- Schedule an Information Session to prepare for Phase III
- Visit our [website](#) for more information

FoundationCCC Partners

- Foundation for California Community Colleges
 - Alé Vazquez, Program Manager
 - Kiana Devereaux, Program Specialist
 - Maddy Koedel, Program Specialist

HCAI-Designation Pathway



Key Takeaways

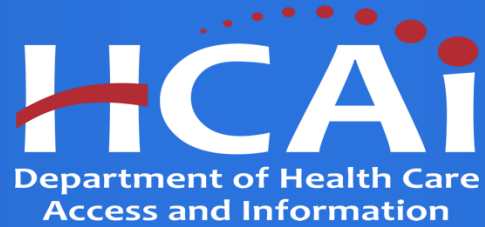
- CCCs are essential for **educating a diverse and representative workforce**
- There is a need for **more associate's-level mental health occupations**
- Provides **additional employment opportunity** for AA students
- Integration with and supporting existing care teams allows **clinicians to operate at the top of their license**
- **Reduces barriers** and encourages entry into behavioral health workforce
- Provides **stepping-stone to 4-year degrees** and more advanced professions

How Can You Participate?

Connect us with the faculty/deans/directors of **social work, human services, addiction studies, and psychology** programs at your local community college!

Next Steps:

- Reach out to contact email: wellnesscoach@foundationccc.org
- Attend a technical assistance session with the HCAI Education Consultant
- Submit a draft [Form 1: Preliminary Demonstration of Certified Wellness Coach I Education Equivalency and Resource Request](#) by March 11
- Prepare and apply for upcoming grant cycle opening March 28 (by invitation only)

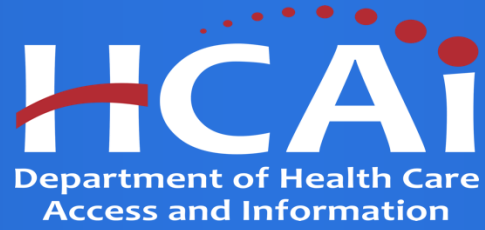


Thank you!

For further questions, please contact:
wellnesscoach@foundationccc.org

Interested in subscribing to our mailing list?
Please visit: <https://hcai.ca.gov/mailing-list/>

Visit the Wellness Coach [website](#)



Appendix

Supplemental Information

HCAI-Designated Education Program Structure: CWC I

Program Area	Credits Earned ¹	Example Coursework & Content
Introduction to Behavioral Health	60 credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to psychology • Introduction to social work • Introduction to case management • Child & adolescent development
Additional Education <i>(includes didactics & experiential learning to ensure individuals have the skills, knowledge, & abilities to be workforce ready)</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human behavior • Basic needs assessment • Screening • Crisis management • Disability approaches • Substance use disorder • Case management, resource linkage • Coaching and counseling frameworks² • Reflective practice (e.g., self-care, self-awareness) • Documentation basics • Cultural responsiveness, humility & implicit bias • Social determinants of health • Professionalism, ethics, legal mandates • Operating in different environments • Community outreach • Trauma-responsive care • Building effective care relationships • Self-integration in BH fields • Individual wellness plans
Field Experience		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 150 hours minimum of supervised experience including direct services, supervision, other clinical related activities, and competency evaluations⁴
Certification		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for and maintain certification through HCAI after completing program. Recertification to be completed every two (2) years

1. Credits from other programs can be transferred if they meet the education institution's requirements. 2. Includes, but not limited to, social emotional learning, active listening, relationship building, creating affirming environments, coaching practice in live settings. 3. Includes, but not limited to, focus on people of color, immigrant, LGBTQ+, Native, limited English proficiency populations. 4. Any combination of hours from field practicum, volunteer hours, and work experience qualify.

HCAI-Designated Education Program Structure: CWC II

Program Area	Credits Earned ¹	Example Coursework & Content
Certified Wellness Coach I Competency	n/a	No additional coursework required
Advanced Behavioral Health	60 credits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling principles • Lifespan development • Abnormal psychology • Child and family welfare • Social determinants of health
Additional Education <i>(includes didactics & experiential learning to ensure individuals have the skills, knowledge, & abilities to be workforce ready)</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced evidence-based practices (e.g., CBT, motivational interviewing, trauma-informed care) for individual and group support • Supervision • Advanced crisis management / suicide prevention² • Reflective practice (e.g., self-care, self-awareness) • Secondary trauma / trauma-informed care • Neurodivergence • Disability approaches II • Substance use disorder II
Field Experience		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 300 hours minimum of supervised experience including direct services, supervision, other clinical related activities, and competency evaluations³
Certification		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for and maintain certification through HCAI after completing program. Recertification to be completed every two (2) years

1. Credits from other programs can be transferred if they meet the education institution's requirements 2. Includes training in suicide impact assessments. 3. Hours from Wellness Coach I education apply towards the total. Any combination of hours from field practicum, volunteer hours, and work experience qualify.

Scope of Services for Certified Wellness Coaches (1 of 2)

Core Activity ¹	Certified Wellness Coach I Scope of Services <i>Under direction of PPS² or licensed professional</i>	Certified Wellness Coach II Scope of Services <i>Under direction of PPS² or licensed professional</i>
1 Wellness Promotion and Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer services to groups or classrooms focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellness promotion and education (e.g., building positive relationships, bullying prevention, diet and exercise in relation to BH) Mental health literacy (e.g., symptom recognition, help-seeking strategies, how to provide support) Life skills (e.g., stress management, time management, problem-solving) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer services to groups or classrooms focused on activities listed in CWC I profession and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behavior activation, including identifying, engaging in, and evaluating activities that promote positive emotions and well-being. Supporting and practicing overcoming maladaptive thinking patterns identified in higher-level care. Distraction strategies (e.g., redirection techniques, mindfulness) Emotional regulation (e.g., emotion recognition and understanding, regulation strategies)
2 Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support youth completing behavioral health screenings (e.g., answer questions, hand-off screenings to BH professionals) Identify and referring BH needs of youth to BH providers in school or broader organization setting Coordinates universal screening programs in schools or other community-based organizations per SAMHSA guidelines³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitates universal screening programs in school or other community-based organizations per SAMHSA guidelines⁴
3 Care Coordination and Extension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect individuals to internal and external BH resources (e.g., local/regional/national organizations, school or broader organization resources, outpatient providers, residential programs, crisis response resources) as well as social services (e.g., food or housing programs) as needed Facilitate communication with other professionals (e.g., BH providers, school personnel) that are providing support and care to youth, including connecting individuals to licensed providers so all care team members work together and operate at the top of their license or certification Provide additional support to providers, school, or broader organization personnel, including BH related administrative activities (e.g., billing support) and extension of non-clinical or clinical BH support 	

1. All activities will be carried out in a manner that reflects cultural concordance. 2. Pupil Personnel Services 3. Coordination refers to the support of day-to-day logistics, such as scheduling, communication, answering questions, and preparing materials under the direction of qualified professionals. 4. Facilitation refers to the operation of screening sessions under the direction of qualified professionals, such as providing instruction and support, collecting and recording data, and ensuring a safe and comfortable environment.

Scope of Services for Certified Wellness Coach (2 of 2)

Core Activity ¹	Certified Wellness Coach I Scope of Services <i>Under direction of PPS¹ or licensed professional</i>	Certified Wellness Coach II Scope of Services <i>Under direction of PPS¹ or licensed professional</i>
4 Individual Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide brief check-ins (~5-15 min) and scheduled meetings (~30 min) that provide emotional support and enhance wellness; individual support may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellness education (e.g., basics of BH symptoms, diet, hydration, and exercise in relation to BH) • Goal setting/planning (e.g., increasing movement, sleep hygiene) • Life skills (e.g., stress management, time management, problem-solving) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities of the Certified Wellness Coach I scope of services, and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavior activation, including identifying, engaging in, and evaluating activities that promote positive emotions and well-being. • Supporting and practicing overcoming maladaptive thinking patterns identified in higher-level care. • Distraction strategies (e.g., redirection techniques, mindfulness) • Emotional regulation (e.g., emotion recognition and understanding, regulation strategies)
5 Group Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver small group programming to enhance wellness and life skills (e.g., social-emotional skills, stress management, time management, organization, problem-solving) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities of the Certified Wellness Coach I scope of services, and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance awareness of the most common BH conditions to promote understanding, reduce stigma, and foster a more informed and empathetic community
6 Crisis Referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhere to a standardized protocol when responding to signs of crisis in the school or broader organization setting • Identify potential risks and refer to the appropriate qualified BH provider or supervisor • Provide emotional support and engage in warm handoffs with the appropriate qualified BH provider or supervisor for youth who are waiting to be seen for crisis services 	

Example Sites for Certified Wellness Coach Services

Applies across ages

Example site	Early childhood ¹	Elementary school ²	Middle and high school ³	Transition aged ⁴
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preschool programs Head start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary school campus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High school campus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community colleges Four year colleges
Community-based Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> YMCA Boys and Girls Club Community centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community centers After-school programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community centers Mobile crisis
Health Centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary care Tribal health programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primary care clinics Tribal health programs Hospital specialty clinics Residential treatment centers Partial hospitalization programs Crisis service providers Federally qualified health centers Rural health clinics School health centers 		
Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Childcare and development programs AIMSS⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Juvenile justice Homeless service providers Foster care service providers Home-based & home-visiting programs 		
Telehealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology/telecommunication solutions to support specific groups (e.g., rural areas, foster care system) After-hours services and easy-to-reach services for all groups DHCS Platform 			

1. Ages 0-5. 2. Elementary schools with children aged 6-12. 3. Public middle and high schools with youth aged 13-18.
4. Ages 18-25. 5. American Indian Maternal Support Services.

Example Criteria for Sites

- **Sites that have direct youth engagement** (e.g., elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools).
- Sites that **promote sustainable impact**, including those that:
 - **Youth frequently occupy**, would want to try behavioral health services, and/or **trust the current services and individuals**
 - **Value coach services** and offer continued mentorship and professional development
 - **Employ staff knowledgeable about behavioral health services** and motivated to integrate coaches
- Consider sites that **promote feasibility**, including those that:
 - Serve youth with **needs that are appropriate for coaches' level of education and training**
 - **Offer infrastructure that supports scalability** (e.g., telehealth)

*Non-exhaustive