

# Now is the Time to License Michigan Genetic Counselors

## Genetic counselor licensure will provide Michigan citizens:

### Protection from harm of receiving inaccurate information about genetic risks from individuals who do not meet minimum education and certification standards.

- Numerous cases of physical, psychological, or financial harm due to the inappropriate use or interpretation of genetic information have been described.<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- Errors in care may be inevitable, but regulating providers should reduce the frequency.
- Approximately 30% of non-genetics health care providers misinterpret the results of genetic tests that they order on their patients.<sup>4</sup> Errors in interpretation can have a significant impact on patients and their relatives.

### Cost savings of healthcare dollars via accurate testing on appropriate individuals.

- Healthcare providers without training in genetics often order more expensive genetic testing than is indicated, amounting to unnecessary health care expenditures.<sup>5</sup>

### Assurance that minimum education, continuing education, and certification standards have been met by individuals using the title of genetic counselor.

- Genetic counselors hold advanced degrees and are uniquely trained to provide their services.
- The public and some healthcare providers are generally unaware of the minimal standards for formally trained genetic counselors. In fact, patients report receiving services from who they originally believed to be genetics experts, when in fact the providers of these services had very limited, if any, formal genetics training.
- The growing availability of direct-to-consumer genetic testing makes the urgency of ensuring the availability and recognition of quality genetic counseling services to patients in Michigan even greater.<sup>6</sup>
- Human genetics is advancing rapidly, making continuing education critical. In 2018, genetic testing is available for over 5,000 diseases, an increase of over 3,000 diseases over the last 10 years. In the absence of regulation, compliance for important continuing education may be deficient since adherence to professional recommendations is otherwise voluntary and not required to work as a genetic counselor.

### Reassurance that the quality of care in the state of Michigan is comparable to that of neighboring states.

- Nationally, as of November 2018, 25 states have enacted genetic counseling licensure legislation including our nearest neighbors: Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Iowa, and Pennsylvania
- Without licensure, individuals without the appropriate credentials could provide genetic counseling and therefore decrease the quality of the service in Michigan as compared to neighboring states with regulation.

### A mechanism to report, investigate, and sanction claims of incompetent, unethical, and/or unlawful behavior of a genetic counselor.

- In the absence of regulation, there are no professional consequences for practicing outside of defined guidelines. Without regulation, incompetent genetic counselors can continue practicing, leaving families in Michigan vulnerable.

### Guarantee that the state is working to train and retain highly educated health care professionals.

- The state of Michigan is home to two graduate training programs in genetic counseling. Graduates of these programs are in high demand and consider the availability of licensure in a state when seeking employment.

#### References:

2. Brierley K et al. Adverse events in cancer genetic testing: medical, ethical, legal, and financial implications. *Cancer J.* 2012 July-Aug;18 (4);303-9.
3. Bonadies DC et al, Adverse events in cancer genetic testing. The third case series. *Cancer J.* 2014 Jul-Aug;20(4):246-53.
4. Giardiello FM, et al. The use of interpretation of commercial APC gene testing for familial adenomatous polyposis. *NEJM.* 1997;336(12):823-7.
5. Plon SE, et al. Genetic testing and cancer risk management recommendations by physicians for at-risk relatives. *Genet Med.* 2011;13(2):148-54.
6. U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). GAO-10-847T. <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-10-847T>. Updated July 22, 2010.



*Genetic counselors are health professionals specifically trained to address the complex issues associated with genetic disease.*