

ASAM Certification Program FAQs

General Program FAQ

What is ASAM level of care certification?

ASAM level of care certification supports ASAM's mission of increasing access and improving the quality of addiction treatment by providing an independent and comprehensive assessment of a program's fidelity to The ASAM Criteria®.

What is the difference between accreditation and certification?

Certification demonstrates a program's ability to provide a specialized service – in this case a specific ASAM level of care. ASAM level of care certification will not issue a judgment of the quality of service delivered or address broader organizational policies and procedures. ASAM level of care certification will be issued to programs that demonstrate that they have the capacity to deliver that level of care. Accreditation is a comprehensive quality review of the program. Accreditation and certification are complementary of each other.

What levels of care are included in ASAM level of care certification?

ASAM level of care certification will be available for levels 3.1, 3.5, and 3.7 of The ASAM Criteria. These levels were selected because they are the most common levels of residential addiction treatment in the market. Certification for other levels of care may be made developed in the future.

What is the pilot?

ASAM and CARF anticipate opening the certification in early 2019 for a select set of providers to ensure that the certification application and review process works efficiently and that the certification accurately assesses programs based on The ASAM Criteria. The pilot will also help ASAM and CARF identify if the proprietary scoring methodology needs to be adjusted.

Can I be part of the pilot?

Any program interested in participating in the pilot for ASAM level of care certification should contact ASAM by emailing certification@asam.org.

What is the selection process for pilot sites?

ASAM and CARF are collecting information from treatment programs interested in participating in the pilot program. Pilot sites will be selected to cover a sample that reflects the spectrum of programs that may seek certification for these specific levels of care. Considerations will include, geographic location/regions, program size, regulatory environment, funding sources (e.g. private v. public) and more to ensure a diversity of settings.

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Is there a way to learn who is in the pilot program?

All programs issued certification in the pilot program will be identified to the public and searchable on CARF's website. After a program is certified, the program will be required to display the ASAM level of care certification seal at the facility. The program will also be authorized to advertise that it offers the specific ASAM levels of care covered by its certification.

When will the program launch?

ASAM and CARF anticipate piloting the certification in early 2019 for a select set of providers with the expectation that it will be broadly available later in the year.

How does ASAM level of care certification relate to other quality assessment programs?

Certification complements accreditation programs offered by organizations like CARF and The Joint Commission. It will also complement programs such as provider rating systems being developed by organizations like The Shatterproof Foundation.

How is this partnership good for key stakeholders?

Patients: Certification will promote identification of treatment programs that are equipped to provide treatment in alignment with the nationally-recognized standards found in The ASAM Criteria. In doing so, certification allows patients to access evidence-based care that will provide them the best chance of recovery.

Payors: ASAM level of care certification will provide payors with an independent, objective criterion upon which to assess potential providers for partnership and network contracting and to base medical and network management. In addition, ASAM level of care certification will establish that certified programs meet consistent criteria across the country.

Treatment programs: ASAM level of care certification will allow treatment programs to distinguish themselves from the competition and promote substantive compliance with the principles of The ASAM Criteria.

Will ASAM level of care certification grade treatment programs?

Certification is not a grading system. Rather, certification is a designation that helps clearly identify treatment programs that align with national standards for specific levels of care, as defined in The ASAM Criteria. When a program is certified for a specific level of care, it tells healthcare consumers and payors that the program has demonstrated the ability to deliver addiction treatment services consistent with the nationally recognized, research-validated guidelines for that level of care.

How long will the certification last?

After a program is certified, CARF will annually require attestation to the elements of the certification. To continue certification beyond three years, the program will need to demonstrate satisfaction of the ratable elements through another survey.

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How will certified programs be identified?

After a program is certified, the program will be required to display the ASAM level of care certification seal at the facility and in marketing publications, including its website. The program will also be authorized to advertise that it offers the specific ASAM levels of care covered by its certification. In addition, certified programs will be identified to the public and searchable on the CARF website.

CARF & ASAM Partnership FAQ

Why are ASAM and CARF working together?

ASAM and CARF each bring essential core competencies to the partnership. The ASAM Criteria, formerly known as The ASAM Patient Placement Criteria, is the result of a collaboration that began in the 1980s to define one national set of criteria for providing outcome-oriented and results-based care in the treatment of addiction. Today, The ASAM Criteria is the most widely used and comprehensive set of guidelines for placement, continued stay, and transfer/discharge of patients with addiction and co-occurring conditions. Similarly, CARF is the nation's leading accreditation entity for behavioral health provider organizations and has unrivaled experience in the process of developing and implementing accreditation standards and programs.

How are ASAM and CARF working together?

ASAM and CARF collaborated on the development of the proprietary ratable elements for certification and the scoring methodology. The certification elements and scoring methodology include certain pass/fail elements that ASAM has determined are so essential that an applicant that fails a single one will not be certified. Applicants that pass all of these pass/fail elements may be certified based on their overall demonstrated satisfaction of the other elements. An applicant that is issued certification but does not satisfy all of the elements will be required to submit a plan of action to CARF. CARF will be completely independent from ASAM in making any determination of certification as to a specific program. Programs will need to demonstrate that they have the capacity to deliver services by level of care with the characteristics described in The ASAM Criteria as represented by the ratable elements.

What is CARF doing?

Programs will submit applications for certification to CARF directly. CARF will review individual provider applications, conduct a site visit, and issue a report and certification decision.

What is ASAM doing?

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ASAM will publish the ratable elements for certification, an ASAM level of care certification document, self-assessment workbook, and offer training and other educational resources to help programs prepare for certification.

ASAM Criteria and Clinical FAQ

How does the certification relate to The ASAM Criteria?

ASAM level of care certification will be issued to programs that demonstrate that they have the capacity to deliver a specific level of care identified in The ASAM Criteria, as represented by satisfaction of the applicable ratable elements in accordance with the scoring methodology. ASAM level of care certification will be available for levels 3.1, 3.5, and 3.7 of The ASAM Criteria. These levels were selected because they are the most common levels of residential addiction treatment in the market. Certification for other levels of care may be made developed in the future.

How does the program relate to other ASAM Criteria activities (e.g. ASAM CONTINUUM™)?

Applicants will not be required to utilize ASAM CONTINUUM but programs that do utilize ASAM CONTINUUM will meet the ratable elements for assessment.

Will it be clear if a program uses medication treatment?

Certified programs will have procedures that describe how access to medications prescribed for addiction treatment are accessed by patients in the program.

Will certification ensure quality of care in these facilities?

Certification indicates a program's demonstrated ability to provide a specialized service – in this case a specific ASAM level of care. ASAM level of care certification will not issue a judgment of the quality of service delivered or address broader organizational policies and procedures. ASAM level of care certification will be issued to programs that demonstrate that they have the capacity to deliver that level of care.

Policy FAQ

My program is already an ASAM Level of Care, what does certification mean?

ASAM level of care certification will provide the only basis for ASAM-authorized representations of operating in accord with The ASAM Criteria or its levels of care. ASAM does not endorse the validity of any other assertion of a program's operations being in accordance with The ASAM Criteria.

My program is required to operate at an ASAM Level of Care, does this mean I have to get certified?

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ASAM strongly encourages any entity that is required by contractual or regulatory obligation to operate pursuant to a particular ASAM Criteria level of care to seek ASAM level of care certification. Programs that have not been issued ASAM level of care certification by CARF may not represent to the public that they deliver a particular ASAM level of care.

My state assigns ASAM levels of care that are different from what is described in the ASAM level of care certification program, what should I do?

Please contact ASAM to inquire about receiving permission for the use of designations or content from The ASAM Criteria. ASAM and The ASAM Criteria are recognized trademarks and use of content within The ASAM Criteria requires permission. ASAM offers licenses for use of its content for qualified entities.

My program is already accredited; does my accreditation include certification?

No. To be issued certification, an accredited program that desires ASAM level of care certification must apply to CARF and successfully demonstrate satisfaction of the ratable elements through an onsite survey.

Do I need to be accredited in order to be certified?

No. Programs may seek certification regardless of accreditation.

Are there any payment incentives for ASAM level of care certification?

The comprehensive opioid legislation passed by Congress in early October 2018—H.R. 6, the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Act—included a partial repeal of the Medicaid Institutions for Mental Diseases (IMD) exclusion. This will allow state Medicaid programs to fund inpatient treatment in residential facilities that can deliver services consistent with certain requirements, including evidence-based assessments and treatment delivery system requirements.

ASAM level of care certification is one way that ASAM and CARF can help states and treatment providers promote access by Medicaid beneficiaries to the highest quality and most cost-efficient delivery of care. Section 1115 Medicaid demonstration waivers require that applicants “demonstrate how they are implementing evidence-based treatment guidelines, such as those published by the American Society of Addiction Medicine.” The certification is an independent evaluation of how programs meet requirements described in The ASAM Criteria and may be leveraged to help demonstrate requirements of the 1115 waiver.

The ASAM Criteria is also heavily used in the commercial marketplace, with it being the medical necessity criteria for more than 50 million Americans. By utilizing the certification, programs will have a way to distinguish their delivery of services as being in alignment with the nationally recognized standard for addiction care – The ASAM Criteria.