



March 12, 2021

Arizona Medical Board
 1740 W. Adams Street
 Suite 4000
 Phoenix, AZ 85007

Dear Board Members,

The undersigned organizations represent over 15,000 physicians in our state. We write today to express our concern with questions on Arizona’s physician licensure application pertaining to mental health treatment and the unintended consequences they may have on those seeking to practice medicine in Arizona. We appreciate your attention to this important issue and your efforts to improve the language for current and future Arizona physicians.

The Arizona Medical Board asks questions about an applicant’s past mental health treatment in their initial and renewal licensure applications. The initial application language requires an applicant to disclose whether they have been treated within the past five years, of a physical, mental, or emotional condition which currently affects their ability to practice medicine.¹ The renewal language requires an applicant to reveal any treatment they have received since their last renewal for a physical, mental, or emotional condition which currently affects their ability to practice medicine.² Despite the disclaimer on the application that treatment in itself is not a basis on which to be denied, the underlying question is still a deterrent to physicians and physician in training seeking treatment.³ In a study conducted by

¹ Arizona Medical Board MD Initial and Endorsement License Application, *available at:* https://azmbfileblob.blob.core.windows.net/azmd/MD_202001301440_b1c963b534262af49a2c02a3aee3e.pdf
² Arizona Medical Board Biennial MD License Renewal Application, *available at:* https://azmbfileblob.blob.core.windows.net/azmd/MD_201907301058_35e75308573d479eb2dab7ca60f32e89.pdf
³ Medical Licensure Questions and Physician Reluctance to Seek Care for Mental Health Conditions, *available at:*

Mayo,⁴ 40% of physicians stated they would be reluctant to seek formal medical care for treatment of a mental health condition because of concerns about repercussion to their licensure.

Such application questions are stigmatizing and have, for quite some time, constituted a well-recognized impediment to physicians seeking appropriate mental health treatment. Now, the Covid-19 pandemic has created a mental health crisis for our nation; physicians who have been on the frontline helping patients for the past year are not spared from this crisis. Unfortunately, physicians have been hesitant to seek mental health treatment during the pandemic specifically because of the negative impact it may have on their licensure.⁵ In some cases, this has been deadly. “Currently, more than one physician in the United States dies by suicide every day.... many continue to suffer in silence out of fear of the professional stigma of seeking help.”⁶

The Federation of State Medical Boards and the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine have acknowledged the language used by many state licensing boards inadvertently discriminates against physicians with mental illness and is not in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.⁷ These organizations recommend state medical boards begin only using language requesting an applicant to disclose a known *current* condition which impairs their ability to practice. A number of state licensing boards have followed the lead of the Federation of State Medical Boards by revising their application language to ask only about an applicant’s current health conditions. While the Arizona licensure application was found to be consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act in a 2018 review⁸, a more recent review gave Arizona’s licensing mental health questions a “Grade C”, compared to 23 other states who received “Grade A” or “Grade B”⁹.

Our organizations support revising the language in Arizona’s physician licensure applications to ***“Do you currently have a medical condition that impairs your judgment or adversely affects your ability to practice medicine in a competent, ethical, and professional manner?”*** By supporting this change, the Arizona Medical Board can help ensure that physicians seek timely mental health treatment, without fear of repercussion during initial licensure or renewal. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Jasleen Chhatwal, MBBS, MD
President, Arizona Psychiatric Society



Ross Goldberg, MD, FACS`
President, Arizona Medical Association

[https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196\(17\)30522-0/fulltext](https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/article/S0025-6196(17)30522-0/fulltext)

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ “Doctors forgo mental health care during pandemic over concerns about licensing, stigma,” available at: <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/doctors-forgo-mental-health-care-during-pandemic-over-concerns-about-licensing-stigma>

⁶ Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes’ Foundation, available at: <https://drlornabreen.org/the-issue/>

⁷ Physician Wellness and Burnout, available at: <https://www.fsmb.org/siteassets/advocacy/policies/policy-on-wellness-and-burnout.pdf>

⁸ Medical Licensure Questions About Mental Illness and Compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act, available at:

<http://jaapl.org/content/46/4/458#T1>

⁹ Physician-Friendly States for Mental Health: A Comparison of Medical Licensing Board Applications, available at:

<https://www.pagepressjournals.org/index.php/grmh/article/view/8649/8600>

**ARIZONA PSYCHIATRIC SOCIETY AND ARIZONA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
JOINED BY THE FOLLOWING ASSOCIATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS:**

ARIZONA ACADEMY OF FAMILY PHYSICIANS

ARIZONA CHAPTER, AMERICAN COLLEGE OF CARDIOLOGY

ARIZONA CHAPTER, AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS

ARIZONA CHAPTER, AMERICAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS

ARIZONA COLLEGE OF EMERGENCY PHYSICIANS

ARIZONA GERIATRICS SOCIETY

ARIZONA NEUROLOGICAL SOCIETY

ARIZONA OPHTHALMOLOGICAL SOCIETY

ARIZONA ORTHOPAEDIC SOCIETY

ARIZONA PAIN SOCIETY

ARIZONA SOCIETY OF ANESTHIOLOGISTS

ARIZONA SOCIETY OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY

ARIZONA SOCIETY OF INTERVENTIONAL PAIN PHYSICIANS

ARIZONA RADIOLOGICAL SOCIETY

ARIZONA UROLOGICAL SOCIETY

GENESIS OB/GYN

MARICOPA COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY

PIMA COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY

THE GUIDANCE CENTER

THE NARBHA INSTITUTE

**UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA COLLEGE OF MEDICINE – TUCSON
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY**

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