



National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM®) Factsheet: Information for California Licensed Acupuncturists and Other Interested Stakeholders about the NCCAOM Testing and Certification Program

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Introduction

The purpose of the factsheet is to:

- Familiarize California stakeholders with the development, administration, reliability, and validity of the NCCAOM examinations.
- Describe the Commission's longstanding partnership with state regulatory boards and agencies responsible for licensing acupuncturists throughout the United States.

The NCCAOM examinations and certification programs are based on best practices in the certification industry and meet the testing and certification program standards of the [National Commission on Certifying Agencies \(NCCA\)](#), the independent accrediting body created by the [Institute for Credentialing Excellence](#). All active NCCAOM Certification Programs are accredited by NCCA.

Questions or comments related to this factsheet should be directed to Mina Larson, Chief Executive Officer of the NCCAOM, at executiveoffices@thenccaom.org.

Q. (1) Who is the NCCAOM?

A. (1) The NCCAOM established in 1982 as a nonprofit organization, currently operates under Section 501(c)6 of the Internal Revenue Code. All revenue collected by the organization is used to enhance NCCAOM certification programs; improve the quality of its examinations; provide services to its Diplomates; advance certification research and development; and fulfill its responsibility of protecting the public from unsafe practice. The mission of the NCCAOM is to assure the safety and well-being of the public and to advance the professional practice of acupuncture and Oriental medicine by establishing and promoting national evidence-based standards of competence and credentialing.



Q. (2) *How have the NCCAOM examinations changed since 2003 when the exams were first evaluated by the California Little Hoover Commission?*

A. (2) Since 2003, based on data obtained from [job analyses](#) (JA), also known as occupational analyses or practice analyses, conducted in [2003](#), [2008](#), [2013](#), and [2017](#), the NCCAOM has made extensive changes and significant improvements to its examinations and certification processes, including:

- Created a modular examination structure consisting of four separate exams: Foundations of Oriental Medicine (FOM), Acupuncture with Point Location (ACPL), Chinese Herbology (CH), and Biomedicine (BIO). This change was made at the request of states because of varying scope of practice laws, ensuring that candidates have successfully passed each required module before achieving licensure and/or certification. This modular examination structure has been in place since 2004.
- Introduced the Oriental Medicine Certification program in 2004, which requires passing all four exams.
- Increased the length of the BIO exam from 50 to 100 items in 2010, as a result of the [2008 Job Analysis Survey](#).
- Validated via survey the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) tested on the examinations during the [job analyses](#) and subsequently added competency statements. These are reflected in the development and publication of all examination content outlines since 2008. The [2017 Job Analysis](#) (JA) Report and the [NCCAOM 2020 Examination Content Outlines](#) resulting from the 2017 JA are available on the NCCAOM website www.nccaom.org.

Q. (3) *What changes have occurred regarding the administration of the NCCAOM examinations since 2003?*

A. (3) In 2007, the NCCAOM changed the exam administration format to computer adaptive testing (CAT), which not only improves examination reliability, but also reduces the potential for cheating by minimizing test question exposure, because every examinee receives a unique set of test questions based on the examinee's responses and the test specifications. CAT allows every examination to be scored in real time, and a preliminary "pass" or "fail" screen is generated once the test taker completes the examination. NCCAOM adaptive examinations are administered year-round in highly



secure professional test centers throughout the U.S. and around the world. Please note that on occasion the NCCAOM must administer linear examinations, during certain designated time periods of the year, and after implementation of new content outlines. Foreign language examinations are always administered in linear format.

Year-round testing enables candidates that are approved to test by the NCCAOM to register for the NCCAOM examination(s) throughout the year, pending availability at their desired [Pearson VUE Professional Test Center](#) location. These professional test centers are owned and operated by Pearson VUE and each test center is constructed with identical specifications to ensure the highest security and standardized testing experience for all candidates. Candidate identity is confirmed by means of palm vein readings and photo identification. Tight internal test administration processes, which include camera surveillance of each test taker, prevent cheating during the examination process.

The NCCAOM is also assisted by Prometrics, a national research and psychometric services corporation that conducts professional competency assessment research and provides examination development services and scoring of examinations for many credentialing programs nationwide.

The NCCAOM official test results are typically sent to the examinee within ten business days and are also available in the examinee's NCCAOM portal. The NCCAOM generates official exam results reports, which are sent directly to the state regulatory boards upon the examinee's request. The [NCCAOM® Certification Handbook](#) and the [NCCAOM® Exam Preparation Handbooks](#) provide more detailed information about the examination development and administration processes.

The NCCAOM has demonstrated over the last 39 years, with its issuance of over 39,000 certificates of certification, that it is well equipped to handle the challenges associated with the development and administration of a credible, valid, and legally defensible examination system for the AOM profession.

Q. (4) If the passage of the NCCAOM exams becomes a requirement for state licensure, will current California Licensed Acupuncturists be required to take the NCCAOM exams in order to practice in California?

A. (4) No. Existing California Licensed Acupuncturists will not be required to take the NCCAOM examination in order to practice in California. New California candidates who are applying for



licensure in California would have to be given the opportunity to take the NCCAOM exams as a route for California licensure. It will have NO impact on currently licensed California acupuncturists.

Q. (5) If the NCCAOM exams become a requirement for state licensure, would current California Licensed Acupuncturists who are not certified with the NCCAOM then automatically become NCCAOM Diplomates?

A. (5) No. California licensed Acupuncturists will have the opportunity to apply for NCCAOM certification thru [Route 8: NCCAOM Certification for California Licensed Acupuncturists](#). This is a time-limited route that will close on September 1, 2021. Applicants who meet all requirements of Route 8 will be granted NCCAOM Oriental Medicine certification without taking the NCCAOM examinations.

For details of how and why the NCCAOM can offer this new certification route, please see the NCCAOM® FAQ: *Information about Route 8: [NCCAOM Certification for California Licensed Acupuncturists](#)*.

Q. (6) If passing of the NCCAOM exams is allowed for California state licensure, can active NCCAOM Diplomates who in the future move to California become California Licensed Acupuncturists without having to take any exams?

A. (6) No. The State of California has not provided requirements to obtain a license to practice in California for individuals who have previously taken the NCCAOM certification exams.

Q. (7) How many states that regulate acupuncture use the NCCAOM exams?

A. (7) Of the 47 states that are regulated, 46 states plus the District of Columbia require NCCAOM examinations or full certification as a prerequisite for licensure. This means that practitioners who pass the required NCCAOM examinations and/or become NCCAOM certified in Acupuncture or Oriental Medicine (and who have met state-specific requirements*) can have greater portability to all states that regulate acupuncture.

** Please note: Applicants for licensure may have to complete additional requirements in some states in addition to achieving NCCAOM certification or passing NCCAOM examinations. Applicants for licensure are advised to check with the state agency that regulates acupuncture in the state in which*



they wish to practice ensuring that they have met all state designated requirements. For more information, please visit the [NCCAOM website](#) for a listing of state exam requirements and state regulatory contact information.)

State regulatory boards requiring a state specific licensing exam in addition to using the NCCAOM national exams are:

- **Texas** – State Jurisprudence Exam
- **Nevada** – State Jurisprudence Exam
- **New Mexico** – State Jurisprudence or Legal Exam
- **New Jersey** – Acupuncture Safety and Jurisprudence Exam
- **Mississippi** – State Jurisprudence Exam
- **Oregon** – State Jurisprudence Exam
- **Utah** – State Jurisprudence Exam
- **Idaho** – Blood Borne Pathogen course and comprehensive examination that incorporates clean needle techniques and OSHA procedures and requirements.

Q. (8) *How would the requirement of the NCCAOM exams affect California licensure standards?*

A. (8) The requirement of NCCAOM exams has no bearing on other existing licensure standards in California. The NCCAOM’s main role with state regulatory agencies is to administer a psychometrically defensible, valid, and reliable assessment tool that effectively measures the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) required for safe and effective practice. Each state regulatory body remains responsible for setting and enforcing its own state licensure standards.

The California Acupuncture Board would continue to set their unique standards (including educational and additional competency requirements) for licensure of California acupuncturists and an additional state-specific exam (content not covered on the national entry-level certification exams, such as a California laws or jurisprudence examination).

Each of the 46 states plus the District of Columbia that utilize the [NCCAOM examinations](#) recognize the financial and administrative benefits of requiring NCCAOM certification or passing of the



NCCAOM examinations as **a prerequisite for licensure** of acupuncturists. All examination development and administration costs, as well as legal defensibility, are assumed by the NCCAOM.

Q. (9) Will the requirement of the NCCAOM exams lower the educational standards in California?

A. (9) No. Requiring the NCCAOM exams for California State Acupuncture License will not affect or lower educational requirements as set by the California Acupuncture Board. Each state regulatory agency sets its own educational requirements.

Q. (10) How can a national examination system such as the NCCAOM satisfy the variety of practice acts and scopes of practice for each state that regulates AOM?

A. (10) NCCAOM's modular examination structure allows each state to adopt the exams that are tailored to its AOM practice act requirements, statutes, rules, and regulations. NCCAOM offers four exams for the profession: Foundations of Oriental Medicine, Acupuncture with Point Location, Chinese Herbology, and Biomedicine. State regulatory agencies require either all or a portion of these examinations, depending on their practice act and whether their state regulates the practice of Chinese herbal medicine. Candidates who successfully pass each of the required exams have demonstrated competency in each of the core areas of AOM. The candidates are responsible for completing any additional licensing requirements of their state.

Q. (11) Why is the NCCAOM exam more costly than the California Acupuncture Licensing Exam (CALE)?

A. (11) The NCCAOM of exams are part of nationally accredited certification programs and each exam must meet the rigorous requirements of NCCA accreditation. These examinations are also administered through the tightest and most stringent exam security protocols (please see Q.3) that prevents cheating. The Computer adaptive administration also allows the NCCAOM to administer its exams year-round, which requires a larger, more robust number of exam items in the test banks. Every item that is used for scoring, is statistically validated.

The NCCAOM is continually updating and improving examination content by partnering with experienced subject matter experts (SMEs), exam administration and psychometric vendors. Many of



the proceeds from NCCAOM examination fees go toward examination development to ensure that each of the four examinations are valid and reliable measure of competency. See the [NCCAOM® Examination Preparation Handbooks](#) for detailed information on development and administration of the NCCAOM exams. All policies and procedures for the NCCAOM certification programs must be reviewed a minimum of every five years so that these programs can be reaccredited by the NCCA.

Q. (12) Has the NCCAOM national examination structure ever been legally challenged?

A. (12) No. No legal action has ever been brought against the NCCAOM examinations. The NCCAOM examination development and certification processes for each of its certification programs have met all the essential elements of the [National Commission for Certifying Agencies \(NCCA\)](#) standards for a nationally accredited certification program. In addition, the NCCAOM has an appeal process for its eligibility route, examinations and professional ethics and disciplinary decisions.

Q. (13) What are the benefits of NCCAOM Certification?

A. (13) NCCAOM certification or passing of the NCCAOM exams enables practitioners to apply for licensure in 46 states plus District of Columbia that require this as a prerequisite for licensure. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced in 2018 that NCCAOM National Board-Certified Acupuncturists™, who are also state licensed, now have an established qualification standard for employment positions within the VA Health Administration, according to the published Department of Veteran’s Affairs Handbook ([please see NCCAOM announcement](#)). Many hospitals, employers and insurance companies also require NCCAOM certification as a condition for employment. Through NCCAOM’s work with the Department of Labor’s Bureau Labor and Statistics (BLS), in which Acupuncturists received their own [Standard of Classification in the 2018 BLS Occupational Handbook](#), and other federal agencies, it was learned that a national exam is an integral part of receiving federal recognition with agencies such as Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the Department of Defense.