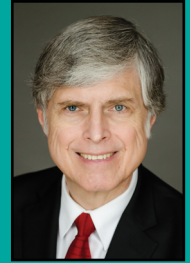


# Why the Certifying Board of the AAMA and the Medical Assisting Education Review Board Are Accountable to Third Parties



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I often receive questions about why the American Association of Medical Assistants® (AAMA) Board of Trustees (BOT) does not have the authority to override decisions of the Certifying Board (CB) of the AAMA and the Medical Assisting Education Review Board (MAERB). The short answer is that the CB and MAERB must have autonomy in policy decision-making to remain accredited and recognized by third parties.

## CMA (AAMA) Certification Program

### NCCA Accreditation

The CMA (AAMA) Certification Program is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) under the NCCA 2021 *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*<sup>1</sup> (*Standards*). To become and remain accredited by the NCCA, a certification program must demonstrate compliance with the following provisions of the *Standards*:

#### Standard 2: Governance and Autonomy

The certification program must be structured and governed in ways ... that ensure *autonomy* in decision-making over *all essential certification activities*.

...

A. ... The process for selection and removal of certification board members [protects] against any *undue influence* that could compromise the integrity of the certification process.

...

2: Essential certification decisions refer to the *core aspects of a certification program*, such as eligibility standards; standards for initial certification and maintaining certification [i.e., recertification]; disciplinary determinations; the development, administration, and scoring of examinations; and the selection of subject-matter experts.

...

5: ... Examples of undue influence can include ... pressure from a *parent organization* or outside entity to adjust certification standards.<sup>1</sup> [Emphases added.]

As the parent organization of the CMA (AAMA) Certification Program, the AAMA—through its BOT—is forbidden by the NCCA *Standards* from (for example) creating the *Content Outline for the CMA (AAMA) Certification Exam*<sup>2</sup>, determining the eligibility pathways, or establishing the minimum passing score for the CMA (AAMA) Certification Exam. These are considered essential certification activities and core aspects of a certification program and must be determined by the CB without undue influence by the BOT (or any other body). If the BOT were to veto or override decisions by the CB on these core aspects of the CMA (AAMA) Certification Program, the result would be a loss of NCCA accreditation.

### The Importance of NCCA Accreditation

Some state laws only recognize medical assisting certifications accredited by the NCCA. One example is present in Washington law:

#### WAC 46-827-0200 Medical assistant-certified—Training and examination.

An applicant for a medical assistant-certified credential must meet the following requirements:

...

(2) Pass a medical assistant certification examination, approved by the secretary, within five years of submitting an initial application. A medical assistant certification examination approved by the secretary means an examination that:

(a) Is offered by a medical assistant program that is accredited by the National

Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA); and

(b) Covers the clinical and administrative duties under RCW 18.360.050 (1).<sup>3</sup>

Another example can be found in California law:

#### Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 16, § 1366.31. Approved Certifying Organizations.

(a) An organization that certifies medical assistants may apply to the Board for approval. This application shall include the following information:

(1) Name and address of the applicant;

(2) Applicant's federal employee identification number (FEIN);

(3) Name, address, and telephone number of a contact person for the applicant;

(4) Documentation establishing that the applicant is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA)<sup>4</sup>

### Accreditation Under ISO 17024

The CB is also accredited by the International Accreditation Service (IAS) under International Standard ISO/IEC 17024:2012(E), "Conformity assessment—General requirements for bodies operating certification of persons" (also known as ISO 17024). The requirements of ISO 17024 are similar to those of the NCCA *Standards*. The CMA (AAMA) Certification Program and the CB are the only medical assisting certification program and certifying body accredited under both the NCCA *Standards* and ISO 17024.

## Medical Assisting Education Review Board (MAERB)

For more reading, visit the AAMA Legal Counsel's blog:

# Legal Eye On Medical Assisting



## **Programmatic Accreditation of Medical Assisting Programs**

The Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) and the Accrediting Bureau of Health Education Schools (ABHES) are the only bodies authorized to programmatically accredit medical assisting programs. CAAHEP is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA); ABHES is recognized by the United States Department of Education. A programmatic accrediting body accredits academic programs in a particular discipline. An institutional accrediting body accredits academic institutions as a whole.

### **MAERB's Relationship to CAAHEP**

MAERB is a committee on accreditation (CoA) of CAAHEP. A CoA is a board or committee that—in conjunction with CAAHEP—establishes accreditation *Standards* for academic programs for an allied health profession; conducts site visits of programs seeking initial or continuing accreditation; determines compliance of programs with the *Standards*; and makes accreditation recommendations to the CAAHEP Board of Directors. CAAHEP is the legal entity that accredits allied health education programs.

CAAHEP has policies that CoAs, such as MAERB, must abide by to remain CoAs of CAAHEP.

### **CAAHEP's Accountability to CHEA**

Because CAAHEP is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), it must comply with the *CHEA Standards and Procedures for Recognition*.<sup>5</sup> The following requirements apply to CAAHEP and other accrediting bodies seeking recognition by CHEA:

## STANDARD 3. ACCREDITATION STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION

A recognized accrediting organization demonstrates that it:

...

3.H. maintains independence from any sponsoring and/or parent organization with respect to all accreditation activities, reviews, actions, and decisions;

...

### 3.H. EXAMPLES OF SUGGESTED EVIDENCE:

- Description of how the accrediting organization's accreditation activities are separate and independent from those of its parent.
- Memorandum of Understanding that confirms the separation.
- Formal (legal) documents ascertaining independence from sponsoring and/or parenting organization.
- Documents demonstrating legal authorization to operate as an accrediting organization.<sup>5</sup>

CAAHEP would lose its recognition by CHEA if it and its CoAs did not abide by the CHEA standards, including maintaining “independence from any sponsoring and/or parent organization with respect to all accreditation activities, reviews, actions, and decisions.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Sponsoring Organizations**

The AAMA is a sponsoring organization of MAERB. A sponsoring organization is defined by the *CAAHEP Policies & Procedures*<sup>6</sup> as follows:

**502 Sponsoring Organizations.** Sponsoring organization members are organizations or agencies that establish or support one or more Committees on

Accreditation and support the CAAHEP accreditation system.<sup>6</sup>

## Summary

The CB is accredited by the NCCA and IAS. These accrediting bodies require that the CB be autonomous in decision-making over core aspects of a certification program. The BOT is not permitted to exercise undue influence over policy decisions that the CB must make.

MAERB is a CoA of the CAAHEP. MAERB must abide by the policies of CAAHEP. CAAHEP is recognized by CHEA. CHEA requires CAAHEP and its CoAs to be separate and independent from parent organizations in formulating and executing accreditation policies and procedures. ♦

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Questions? Contact Donald A. Balasa, JD, MBA, at [DBalasa@aama-ntl.org](mailto:DBalasa@aama-ntl.org) or 800/228-2262.

## References

1. National Commission for Certifying Agencies. *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*. Revised October 2021. Accessed April 15, 2023.
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4. Cal Code Regs tit 16, §1366.31. Accessed April 14, 2023. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/regulations/california/16-CCR-1366.31>
5. Council for Higher Education Accreditation. *CHEA Standards and Procedures for Recognition*. Accessed April 15, 2023. [https://www.chea.org/sites/default/files/other-content/CHEA\\_Standards\\_and\\_Procedures\\_for\\_Recognition-FINAL.pdf](https://www.chea.org/sites/default/files/other-content/CHEA_Standards_and_Procedures_for_Recognition-FINAL.pdf)
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