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The Endorsement Process

Q. What is involved in applying for and earning Endorsement?

A. Achieving Endorsement involves six steps:

1. **Inquire** by downloading endorsement information at [www.ecmhva.org](http://www.ecmhva.org) (Endorsement Overview, Introduction, VAIMH Competencies, Getting Started Form) and/or **Contact Endorsement Coordinator** with any questions at bgrifa@vcu.edu
2. **Register** online at [https://easy.mi-aimh.org/vaimh](https://easy.mi-aimh.org/vaimh) and pay registration fee
3. **Prepare and submit the completed professional portfolio** along with the endorsement fee by the portfolio deadline
4. **A two-person review of the professional portfolio AND, for Levels III & IV only, successful completion of written exam**
5. **Endorsement** - Some notable features of the VAIMH Endorsement (IMH-E®) process include:
   - Assignment of an endorsement Advisor to assist with the process
   - Review of professional portfolio materials by the endorsement Advisor prior to submission for official review
   - Submission of completed professional portfolio to the Endorsement Coordinator who will forward for a two-person review by assigned endorsement committee members
   - Review of completed professional portfolio by assigned endorsement committee members to qualify for Endorsement at Levels I & II
   - Review of completed professional portfolio by assigned endorsement committee members to qualify for endorsement exam at Levels III & IV
   - Administration of three-hour, written endorsement exam, offered twice per year each March and September, for Level III & IV candidates; exam includes multiple choice questions and vignettes to assess knowledge, skills and competencies.
   - Review of exam by 2 assigned endorsement test review committee members
   - Endorsement approved (or not); candidates notified by phone and e-mail.
   - Endorsement certificate signed and mailed along with feedback regarding professional portfolio (Levels I & II) or responses to vignettes in the qualitative portion of the exam (Levels III & IV).
   - Annual renewal of endorsement requires continued membership in VAIMH and annual documentation of 15 hours (minimum) of training experiences which promote infant mental health practice; and 12 hours of reflective supervision/consultation for endorsed members at Levels II, III & IV (Clinical).
Q. How much does the endorsement cost?

A. Fees vary according to the level of endorsement being applied for. There is an initial application fee of $15.00 for Levels I & II, and $25.00 for Levels III & IV that is paid at the time of registration. In addition, membership in VAIMH is required at the time of initial application so that candidates can be notified of relevant training opportunities and receive discounts to register for trainings.

The endorsement processing fee must be sent in when you submit your professional portfolio to the VAIMH Endorsement Coordinator for final review. The endorsement fee is $25.00 for Level I, $100.00 for Level II, $200.00 for Level III and $300.00 for Level IV.

The costs for Level III & IV are in line with credentialing fees that have been established by other professional organizations, e.g. CDA (Child Development Associate) and ACSW (Accreditation for Certified Social Workers). The credentialing fees support the overhead costs of the VAIMH Endorsement (IMH-E®) and allow us to have portfolios and tests carefully reviewed.

There is funding to support applicants at levels I and II. Download the Application Form for Financial Support for Endorsement at level I or II at www.ecmhva.org. Applications must be received no later than 1/15/14 for consideration.

Q. What is the value of a Competency-Based System of endorsement?

A. Endorsement is valuable in three ways:

1. Endorsement provides a set of competencies for professional development in the infant and family field.
2. Endorsement assures that persons providing culturally sensitive, relationship-focused services promoting infant mental health meet standards that are approved by a highly recognized professional organization for the discipline of infant mental health.
3. Endorsement recognizes the importance of continuing education and training for professionals in the infant and family field. Those who earn the endorsement demonstrate their commitment to this principle as they provide services that promote infant mental health with a high level of quality and integrity.

Q. Why should I apply for endorsement?

A. Consider the following:

- To enhance your professional profile as a specialist in the infant and family field
- To affirm the specialized knowledge and skills you have acquired through formal education experience and in-service training
- To validate the work that you have done under the guidance and supervision of experienced mentors in the infant and family field
- To link your professional growth and development to competency standards that reflect best practice
- To be identified as a competent professional in a system that reflects commitment to best practice and quality care for all infants, toddlers and families

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Q. What is required for the Professional Portfolio?

A. Requirements depend on the endorsement level for which you are applying. The following documents are required for all levels:

- Official transcripts in a sealed envelope from all colleges/universities attended
- Documentation of specialized in-service trainings related to culturally sensitive, relationship-based practice promoting infant mental health that reflect competencies, paid work experiences with or related to infants, toddlers, and their families, and reflective supervision/consultation experiences while working with infants, toddlers and their families
- Three reference ratings in sealed envelopes with rater signature across the seal
- Signed Code of Ethics
- Signed Endorsement Agreement
- Proof of membership in VAIMH
- Graduates from a college or university program or post-graduate certificate program in infant mental health must submit documentation of completion of the program, such as a copy of diploma or certificate.

Q. When do portfolio materials have to be submitted?

A. Level I & II candidates may submit finished portfolio materials at any time during the year. Each candidate is advised to review the portfolio materials with the assigned endorsement advisor before final submission. Conversation with the assigned endorsement advisor offers the candidate assurance that all information has been included as requested and alerts the applicant to missing pieces or gaps. Your advisor has access to the information you provide in EASy—the online endorsement application system and can review and advise you as needed.

Level III & IV candidates must submit their finished portfolio materials with the endorsement fee no later than six weeks prior to the exam date (By January 31<sup>st</sup> for March exam and by July 31<sup>st</sup> for September exam) in order to assure adequate time for review, approval and test scheduling. Each candidate must review the portfolio materials with the assigned endorsement advisor before final submission. Your Advisor has access to the information you provide in EASy—the online endorsement application system and can review and advise you as needed. As described above, conversation with the assigned endorsement Advisor offers reassurance that all information has been included as requested and alerts the applicant to missing pieces or gaps in required information.

Reflective Supervision/Consultation

Q. What are the requirements for reflective supervision/consultation?

A. In Virginia, candidates applying at Level I and II must receive a minimum of 24 clock hours of reflective supervision from a qualified reflective supervisor/consultant in no less than one year and no more than a two-year time frame while working with children birth through 36 months and their families. Candidates at Level III and (IV Clinical) must have received a minimum of 50 clock hours of reflective supervision/consultation within the same 1-2 year time frame while working with children birth through 36 months and their families. Reflective supervision/consultation that meets criteria for endorsement must come from someone who is either endorsed
at Level III or Level IV or meets criteria for endorsement at Level III or IV. The only exception is for candidates who are pursuing Level II and are Bachelor’s prepared; they can receive qualified reflective supervision/consultation from someone who has earned Level II endorsement AND is Master’s prepared.

Q. When we are listing reflective supervision received, are we only able to list supervisors who were formally trained in reflective supervision? The reason I ask is that I had former supervisors in other work positions whose styles of supervision were very reflective, but I do not know for sure if they were formally trained in that model of supervision?

A. Reflective supervision/consultation that meets criteria for VAIMH endorsement should come from an individual who has earned endorsement at Level III or IV (or would meet training and reflective supervision criteria for Level III or IV). Clinical supervision can be reflective, but not all is from a specialist in infant mental health. For your portfolio, please only include those hours that were provided by an individual who specializes in infant mental health and that was focused on the practice or the promotion of infant mental health.

Q. My direct supervisor is not an infant mental health specialist and would not meet criteria for endorsement. Our team does present cases to a clinical consultant hired from outside the agency once a month at a two-hour meeting and the consultant is endorsed as an Infant Mental Health Specialist, Level III. However, there are six on our team, so I only present cases twice a year. Do any of the hours spent in these case presentations count toward endorsement?

A. Yes, if you meet and participate in the case consultations once a month for two hours, you will have 24 hours of reflective consultation that meets criteria for endorsement.

Q. I have received my reflective supervision and consultation from multiple sources, i.e., former supervisor, current supervisor, program consultant, and reflective practice group. Should I include all of these sources?

A. If all of those sources meet criteria for endorsement (see previous question), you may include them all as long as the majority of the required clock hours were provided by just one or two supervisors/consultants.

As in relationship-focused practice with families, reflective supervision/consultation is most effective when it occurs in the context of a relationship that has an opportunity to develop by meeting regularly with the same supervisor/consultant over a period of time. Therefore, VAIMH expects that endorsement candidates will have received the majority of the hours (24 clock hour minimum for Levels I & II and 50 clock hours for Levels III & IV-Clinical) come from just one source with the balance coming from no more than one other source. The hours for Reflective Supervision need to have occurred in a period of time that is more than one year and less than two years. For example, a Level III candidate may submit 48 hours of individual reflective supervision provided by the supervisor from Jan 12 through Dec 12 and 12 hours of reflective group supervision provided by a program consultant from Jan 06 through Dec 13.

Some candidates may have special circumstances, e.g. if the program supervisor changed or if the candidate moved positions. Exceptions regarding the number of reflective supervision/consultation providers should be discussed with the Endorsement Coordinator. You may find answers to other questions like this in Best Practice Guidelines for Reflective Supervision/Consultation posted on the www.ecmhva.org website.
**Specialized In-Service Training**

**Q.** I have attended well over 30 hours of in-service training but I’m not sure if all of it will be accepted. Should I submit a list of every in-service training I’ve ever attended?

**A.** All in-service training hours that meet criteria toward endorsement must be related to the VAIMH Competency Guidelines. Be sure to list which specific knowledge or skill area is covered at each training, e.g., attachment, separation and loss; cultural competence; etc. For a training to count toward endorsement, at least one competency must have been covered. It is important to remember that endorsement reflects training specialization in the promotion of culturally sensitive, relationship-based practice promoting social and emotional well-being in the first years of life or infant mental health (birth to age 3).

Although the minimum requirement is 30 hours, we expect endorsement candidates to document that they have achieved competency in all of the categories (as identified at your desired level) via college course work, on-the-job training, in-service opportunities and reflective supervision/consultation. So, if there are still gaps in your competencies with only 30 hours, include as many others as you can to fill in those gaps.

**Q.** How far back can I go when including trainings that meet criteria for endorsement?

**A.** There is no limit on how long ago the training was attended to be counted toward requirements. Some candidates may have been in the field for many years and are encouraged to include all the trainings that have shaped their practice in infant-family work. However, it is not necessary to submit a comprehensive list of every training ever attended. **The list should reflect a balance of breadth and depth across the competencies and the promotion of infant mental health.**

**Q.** Are only VAIMH sponsored trainings eligible for endorsement?

**A.** The training does not need to be sponsored by VAIMH to be eligible to count toward your minimum for endorsement. In fact, many trainings that you attend for professional licensing or agency requirements may also qualify for endorsement (for example, an ethics training for social workers, training about family-centered planning, or doula training, to name only a few).

A specialized training that is eligible for endorsement should meet the following criteria:

1. Is culturally sensitive, relationship-focused and promotes infant mental health
2. Relates to one or more of the competencies in the VAIMH Competency Guidelines
3. Is specific to the level of endorsement for which you are applying

**Q.** I was reading the endorsement requirements for trainings at Level II and it states I need "30 clock hours of relationship-based education training pertaining to the social and emotional development of infants, toddlers and families" and then under Continuing Endorsement Requirements it states: "15 hours per year of relationship-based education training, approved by the organization, specific to the social and emotional well-being of infants, toddlers, and families." Are these two separate requirements or do they overlap?

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A. The minimum of 30 clock hours that is required with your initial portfolio for endorsement can have been earned over the course of your career, even if they were attended many years ago.

In order to renew endorsement, a minimum of 15 additional hours of specialized in-service training is required annually. Annual Endorsement renewal is based on the calendar year, from January to December. All endorsement renewal documentation will be due by June 30th each year, with the exception of those members who earned endorsement after January of the previous year. Annual documentation of endorsement renewal requirements need to be submitted by the due date in order to remain active on the VAIMH Endorsement Registry.

Q. Are there any in-service trainings, conferences or courses that are mandatory while working toward endorsement?

A. No. But we do strongly recommend that you carefully review the VAIMH Competency Guidelines to identify the skill and knowledge areas for the level for which you are applying. We expect candidates to document competency in these areas either through course work, work experience, reflective supervision/consultation, and/or in-service training. It is important to seek out in-service training/conference offerings that will fill in any competency gaps you might have. Some skill areas (such as empathy and compassion, self-awareness) will be documented in the three reference ratings that you will include with your portfolio.

VAIMH offers an optional self-study form called The Getting Started Form available on the www.ecmhva.org website that can help you identify your competency strengths and gaps.

Trainings that do not meet criteria would be focused primarily on school-aged children or adolescents or the elderly.

Q. I heard from a colleague that I could count only one conference in my Professional Portfolio. Is that true?

A. Candidates must document a minimum of 30 hours of relevant in-service training. Candidates are encouraged to include all relevant conferences that they have attended, but only one conference (with many workshops) may be counted toward the 30-hour minimum. VAIMH recognizes that conferences are an important way to be exposed to new material, but believes a balance with lengthier, more intense in-services of six hours or more helps to build skills.

Specialized Work Experience

Q. Is there a difference between the specialized work experiences that meet criteria for Infant Family Specialist (Level II) versus Infant Mental Health Specialist (Level III)?

A. Yes, in general Level II work experience is more broad and encompasses many of the ways that candidates might work with the families of infants and toddlers including case management, Part C service coordination, parent-child play groups, parent education, and family support. Level III work experiences are often (but not always) home-based and include the following interventions: advocacy, developmental guidance, emotional support, concrete assistance, and parent-infant psychotherapy.
Competence as an Infant Mental Health Specialist (Level III) builds with supervised work experience over time with services delivered to the families of infants and toddlers that are relationship-focused and culturally sensitive with an emphasis on examining the role of relationships in reflective supervision.

Q. How many infants or toddlers do I need to work with to meet the specialized work criteria?

A. Endorsement applicants should have enough experience with infants/toddlers so that the persons who complete the reference rating forms can confidently answer questions about the applicant’s knowledge and skills related to the promotion/practice of infant mental health. For practitioners whose work experience has been primarily with preschool aged children, VAIMH expects service delivery to a minimum of 10 families where the infant/toddler* is the target of the intervention over a period of time that is at least six months. If the practitioner’s experience has not yet included infants/toddlers or preschoolers, VAIMH expects service delivery to a minimum of 10 families where the infant/toddler is the target of the intervention over a period of time that is at least two years. (*Infant/toddler = birth to 36 months)

Q. I have my Master’s degree, so shouldn’t I start at Level III?

A. Overall, Endorsement is seen as a professional development ladder. It is most common for people to start at Level II. Over time, once practitioners have had an opportunity to serve many infant mental health cases while receiving reflective supervision/consultation from someone who is endorsed and after participating in many specialized in-service training opportunities, they may have developed a degree of expertise that qualifies them for Level III. It is important to be sure that a candidate has achieved that expertise so that there is greater assurance of successfully completing the written exam. Also, once a practitioner has earned Level III, they can be considered as potential providers of reflective supervision/consultation to other candidates who are seeking endorsement.

Q. What happens after I submit my professional portfolio?

A. All portfolios are carefully reviewed by two members who have earned endorsement and/or are members of the Endorsement Committee. Reviews are conducted using an eight-page checklist that includes all of the knowledge and skill areas, including reflective supervision or consultation experiences, under the broader competency categories. After examining your official transcripts, the reference rating forms, and your lists of specialized work, in-service training, and reflective supervision/consultation experiences, each reviewer will make recommendations about whether to endorse (Level I and II) or to approve you to sit for the exam (Level III and IV) or may suggest that you pursue further training and/or reflective supervision and then be re-reviewed after a period of time.

The Endorsement Exam

Q. When is the exam offered each year?

A. The exam is offered twice per year in March and September. In order to be approved to sit for the exam, a Level III or Level IV candidate must submit their portfolio and all required documents no later than 6 weeks prior to the exam date (January 31st for March exam and July 31st for September exam).
Q. What is the format of the exam?

A. There are two parts to the test: Part 1 consists of multiple choice questions. Part 2 consists of three vignettes or scenarios; you are asked to answer two of the three. You will have three hours to complete the examination (i.e., 90 minutes to complete Part 1 and 90 minutes to complete Part 2). The material covered requires knowledge about pregnancy, early development and clinical practice experiences. Both parts draw on cumulative learning experiences in college or university settings and specialized in-service trainings, as well as self-study (e.g. books and journal articles about infancy, early parenthood and infant mental health). Your supervised work experiences with infants, toddlers and families, and experiences within reflective supervision or consultation groups related to your work with infants and families will also contribute to learning that is reflected in the examination questions.

Q. What primary topics are covered in the multiple-choice portion of the test?

A. The multiple choice questions are related to the competencies as indicated in the VAIMH Competency Guidelines booklet such as:

- Attachment separation, and loss
- Pregnancy, infant and young child development and behavior
- Relationship-based therapeutic practice
- Infant mental health screening and assessment
- Disorders of infancy/early childhood
- Cultural competence
- Reflective practice

Q. How should I study for the exam?

A. Studying for the test will vary from person to person. If you are currently engaged in relationship-based practice with infants and their families, receive reflective supervision and have consistently updated your knowledge and skills through specialized in-service training or enrollment in university or college course work specific to infancy, early parenthood and infant mental health, you will most likely be very well prepared. If you have not engaged in clinical practice or attended in-service trainings or university-based coursework specific to the promotion of infant mental health, you will find the test challenging. There is an Exam Suggested Resource List available on the www.ecmhva.org website.

Q. What happens if I do not pass the exam?

A. A passing score on Part 1 (multiple choice) of the exam is 80%. Candidates who receive a score of less than 80% will be invited to take the exam again in one year. In order to carefully protect the exam materials, candidates will not receive specific feedback related to the questions missed on Part 1. Candidates who do not receive a passing score on Part 2 (response to vignettes/scenarios) will be provided specific feedback based on exam reviewers’ remarks. Those candidates will be invited to take the exam again in one year. There is no charge to retake Part 1 or Part 2 of the exam.
Annual Renewal of Endorsement

Q. How do I keep my endorsement current?

A. In order to renew the VAIMH Endorsement® annually, the following is required:

- Maintain membership in VAIMH. To renew VAIMH membership, please go to www.ecmhva.org to download the VAIMH application form. For endorsement, VAIMH memberships must be individual, not organizational.
- Submit an annual Endorsement Renewal Form (available for download from the Endorsement page of the www.ecmhva.org website by June 30th each year
- Documentation of 15 clock hours of training related to knowledge and skill areas detailed in the Competency Guidelines
- For all professionals endorsed as an Infant Family Specialist (Level II), Infant Mental Health Specialist (Level III) and Infant Mental Health Mentor-Clinical (Level IV), a minimum of 12 hours ongoing reflective supervision/consultation (RSC) is required.

Using the IMH-E® mark

Q. How do I indicate that I have earned the VAIMH Endorsement®?

A. The IMH-E® mark indicates that a person has earned endorsement. Use of the registered trademark is important (whenever possible) to distinguish from other systems of "endorsement." The level of endorsement is indicated after the IMH-E® in parentheses and the title can be written under, such as:

Jane Doe, MSW, LCSW, IMH-E® (III)
Infant Mental Health Specialist