

# **Workforce Retention:** Preparing for More Equitable Outcomes on Licensure Exams

National Council for Mental Wellbeing  
Partner Webinar  
September 21, 2023



# Agenda

- Summary
- ASWB Data
- Market Reaction & ASWB Response
- Problem Statement
- Doing Our Part





# Summary

We lose thousands of licensure-track therapists from the workforce every year due to candidates' inability to pass licensure exams. And those outcomes are not evenly distributed by demographic: more than 30% fewer Black-identifying test-takers pass their licensure than their White-identifying counterparts.

In this Roundtable we will 1) share details on the ASWB pass rate data (as an example), 2) discuss the ASWB response, and 3) share what employers can do to support their pre-licensed therapists to improve retention and promote more equitable outcomes.



# ➤ ASWB Data





# ASWB Report Overview

- Published in August 2022, reports outcomes over prior year (2021) and prior eleven year (2011-2021) periods
- Reports data separately for each Clinical, Masters, and Bachelors exams
- For each exam, reports the following data for each period:
  - # of test takers
  - First-time test taker pass rates
  - Ultimate pass rates
  - Performance splits by demographic: race/ethnicity, gender, age, and primary language
- Note: ASWB is not the only testmaker in behavioral health, and social work exams are not the only licensure exams, but 1) ASWB (to its credit) has produced the most robust recent reporting of any testmaker, and 2) we expect that other licensure exams in behavioral health would show similar results



# ASWB Report Details: Clinical Exam First-Time Test-Takers

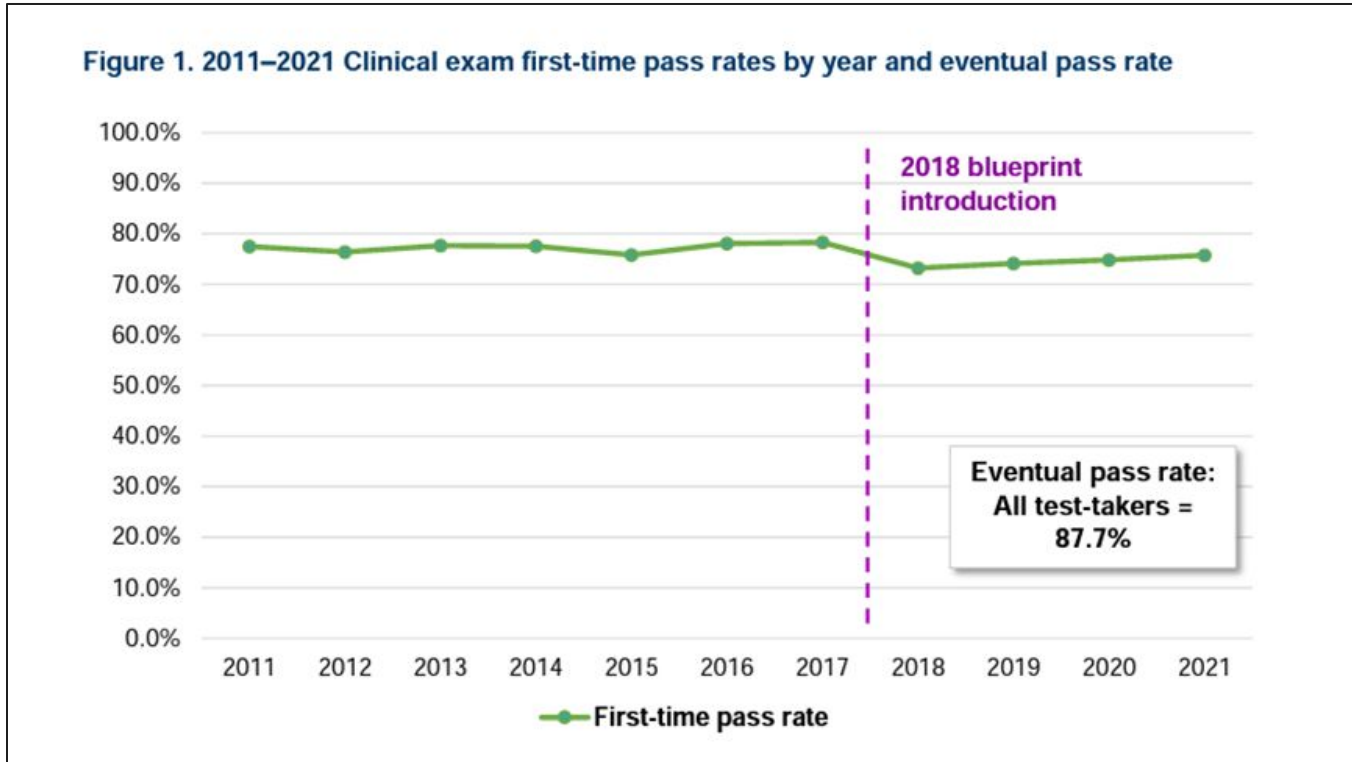
Table 2. 2011–2021 number of Clinical exam first-time test-takers by race/ethnicity

Race/ Ethnicity	In 2011	Proportion of test- takers	In 2021	Proportion of test- takers	Total 2011– 2021	Proportion increase/ decrease 2011–2021
Asian	162	2%	768	4%	4,805	+2%
Black	1,079	12%	2,932	14%	20,858	+2%
Hispanic/Latino	466	5%	2,726	13%	14,988	+8%
Multiracial	119	1%	576	3%	3,423	+2%
Native American/ Indigenous peoples	57	1%	115	1%	911	0%
White	6,855	75%	12,977	63%	105,758	-12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,100</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>20,657</b>	<b>--</b>	<b>155,633</b>	<b>--</b>

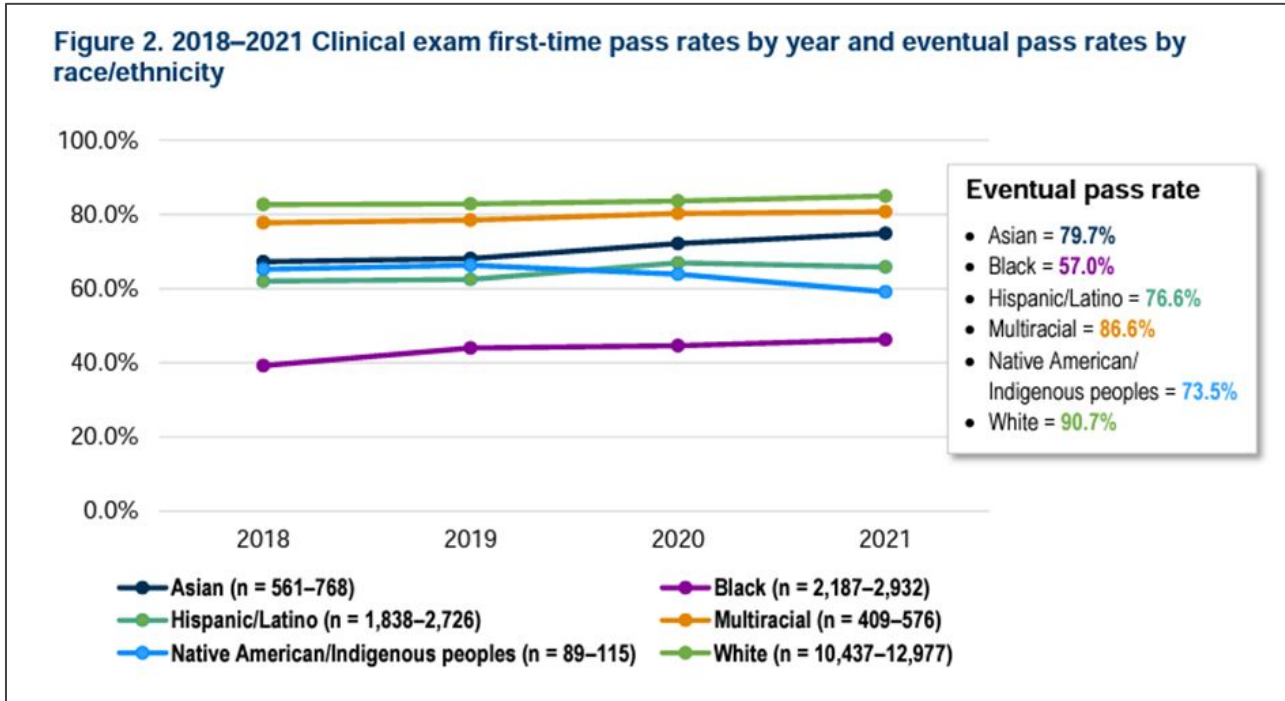
**Note.** Percentages may not total 100 percent because test-takers who selected options such as Prefer not to say or filled in their own identifiers were excluded from this analysis. These options were not available to test-takers at all points during the target time period. ASWB has altered the response options available on the exam registration forms and will continue to evaluate these options to ensure test-takers may accurately respond.



# ASWB Report Details: Clinical Exam Pass Rates

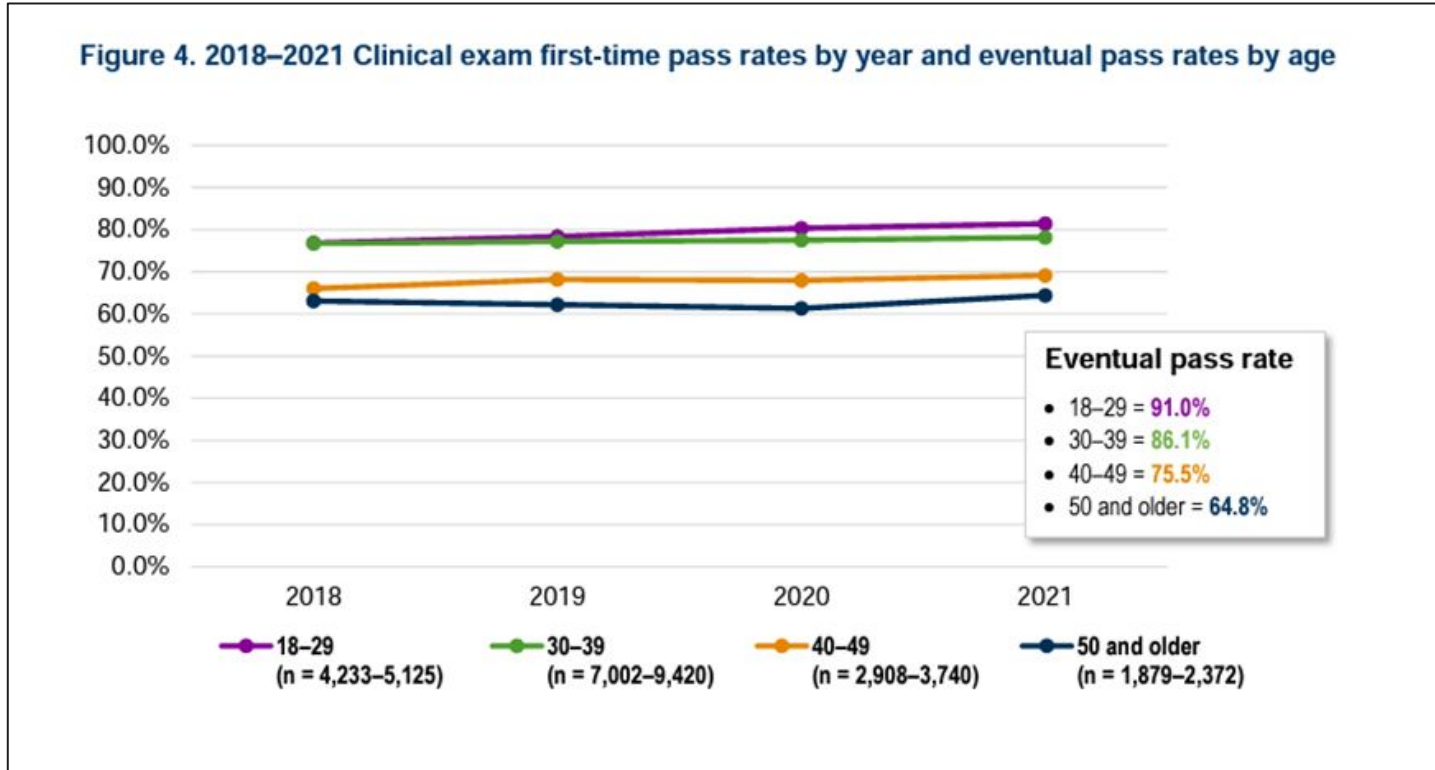


# ASWB Report Details: Clinical Exam Pass Rates by Race/Ethnicity

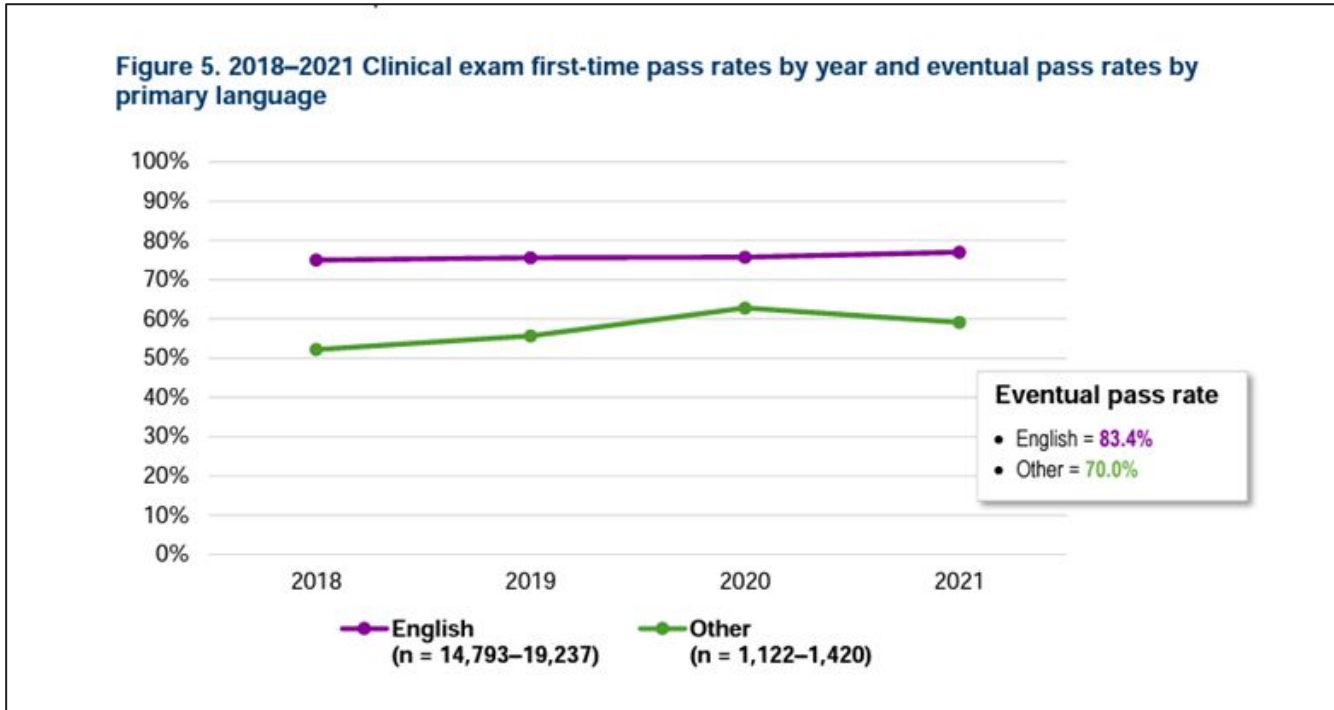




# ASWB Report Details: Clinical Exam Pass Rates by Age



# ASWB Report Details: Clinical Exam Pass Rates by Primary Language



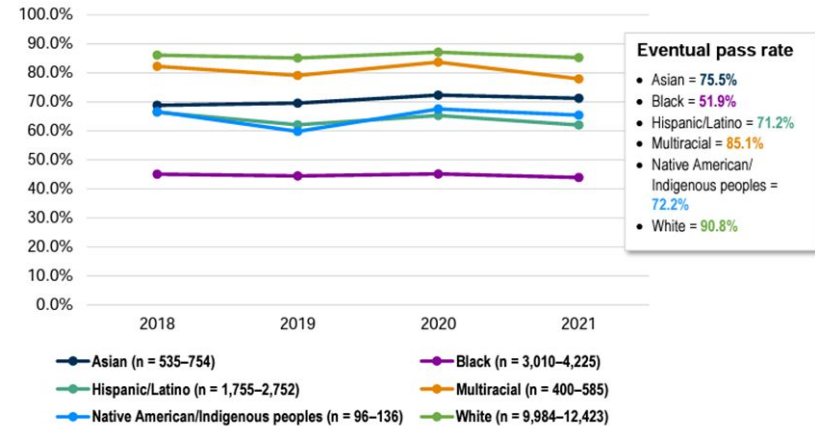
# ASWB Report Details: Masters Exam Details

Table 5. 2011–2021 number of Masters exam first-time test-takers by race/ethnicity

Race/ Ethnicity	In 2011	Proportion of test-takers	In 2021	Proportion of test-takers	Total 2011–2021	Proportion increase/ decrease 2011–2021
Asian	351	3%	754	3%	5,510	0%
Black	1,686	15%	4,225	20%	30,646	+5%
Hispanic/Latino	782	7%	2,752	13%	17,093	+6%
Multiracial	202	2%	585	3%	3,959	+1%
Native American/ Indigenous peoples	66	1%	136	1%	947	0%
White	7,747	69%	12,423	57%	108,550	-12%
Total	11,260	--	21,650	--	172,289	--

Note. Percentages may not total 100 percent because test-takers who selected options such as *Prefer not to say* or filled in their own identifiers were excluded from this analysis. These options were not available to test-takers at all points during the target time period. ASWB has altered the response options available on the exam registration forms and will continue to evaluate these options to ensure test-takers may accurately respond.

Figure 9. 2018–2021 Masters exam first-time pass rates by year and eventual pass rates by race/ethnicity



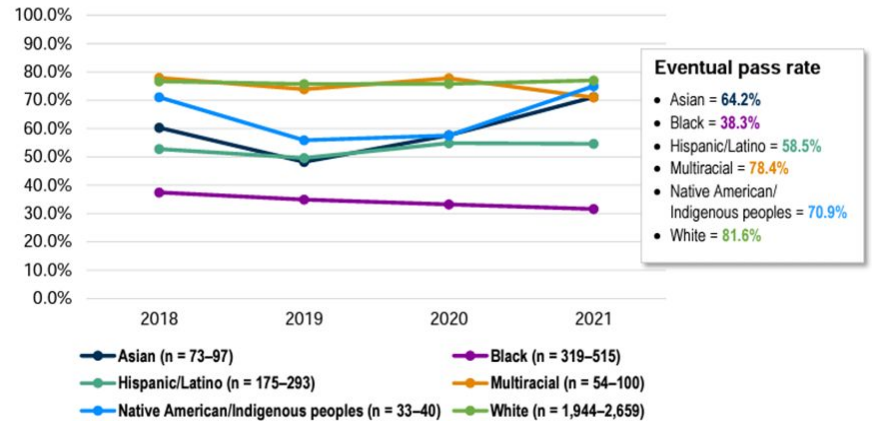
# ASWB Report Details: Bachelors Exam Details

Table 8. 2011–2021 number of Bachelors exam first-time test-takers by race/ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	In 2011	Proportion of test-takers	In 2021	Proportion of test-takers	Total 2011–2021	Proportion increase/decrease 2011–2021
Asian	55	2%	97	3%	793	+1%
Black	515	16%	446	13%	5,614	-3%
Hispanic/Latino	174	6%	293	8%	2,634	+2%
Multiracial	36	1%	100	3%	710	+2%
Native American/Indigenous peoples	15	1%	40	1%	313	0%
White	2,308	73%	2,406	69%	28,968	-4%
Total	3,164	--	3,494	--	40,038	--

**Note.** Percentages may not total 100 percent because test-takers who selected options such as *Prefer not to say* or filled in their own identifiers were excluded from this analysis. These options were not available to test-takers at all points during the target time period. ASWB has altered the response options available on the exam registration forms and will continue to evaluate these options to ensure test-takers may accurately respond.

Figure 16. 2018–2021 Bachelors exam first-time pass rates by year and eventual pass rates by race/ethnicity



# ASWB Report Summary

- Overall pass rates have remained relatively flat over the past four year period, but still lag behind other comparable exams (e.g. NCLEX: first-time pass rate for US-educated test-takers = 90.7%)
- We are losing thousands of would-be clinicians every year based on failure to pass licensure exams

Period	Clinical	Masters	Bachelors	Total
2021	2542	3052	684	6278
2011-2021	19,143	24,292	7727	51,162

- Given disparity in exam pass rates, “lost clinicians” are not distributed evenly across demographics

Population (2021)	Clinical	Masters	Bachelors	Total
“Lost” Black clinicians	1260	2032	275	3567
% of total test-takers	14%	20%	13%	~15%
% of total “lost”	50%	67%	40%	57%



# ➤ **Market Reaction & ASWB Response**



# Market Reaction

- Received a lot of (negative) press pick-up
  - From industry outlets
    - [NASW](#): “ASWB social work licensing exam pass rate data confirm concern over racial disparities”
    - [SimplePractice](#): “The Controversy Over Racial Bias in Mental Health Clinical Exams”
  - ...and from broader media
    - [The Imprint](#): “Results in Social Worker Exams Reveal Stark Racial Disparities”
    - [Change.org Petition](#): “ASWB: End Discriminatory Social Work Licensing Exams”
- ...but also some voices on the “other side” of the issue:
  - [New York Times](#): “Lower Black and Latino Pass Rates Don't Make a Test Racist”
- Some states (e.g. CT) have moved to waive licensure exam requirements from the licensure process, relying instead only on education and practice under supervision





## **ASWB Response: Statement from the CEO**

“The Association of Social Work Boards acknowledges and calls out systemic and institutional racism, specifically anti-Blackism, as being core to the racial disparities evidenced by the recently released licensing exam pass rate data. While other pass rate disparities exist, the most jarring and disappointing gap is in the rates reported for Black candidates. ASWB stands firm that this revelation does not in any way reflect on the ability of Black candidates to demonstrate competence. Rather it illuminates the historical burdens of racial trauma, marginalization, and social injustice to which Black candidates have been disproportionately subjected along their journey to licensure.”







## ASWB Response: Test Changes

- Beginning January 2023, ASWB exam forms started to include a mix of both three- and four-option questions. This has replaced the previously all-four-options multiple choice exam format. The reduction in the number of answer options is, per the ASWB, designed to “offer test-takers a better experience by reducing time pressure and ensuring a focus on a test-taker’s social work knowledge.”
- The ASWB intends to gradually phase in additional three-option questions moving forward, eventually transitioning fully to three-option multiple choice questions by 2025.





## ASWB Response: Test Changes

- Reducing total answer choices from four to three will improve pass rates for Black and other minoritized test-takers...but it also will improve pass rates for white test-takers.
- By reducing the number of answer choices, it makes all questions easier to answer (including “guess”) correctly. This will reduce the “good kind of discrimination” - being able to discern between those who should be passing an exam and those who shouldn’t, irrespective of demographics - without necessarily reducing discriminatory practices.
- Mathematically, it is likely to raise Black test-taker pass rates more than their White counterparts, but only because there is a larger gap to make up.



# ➤ Problem Statement





# Problem Statement

One or more of the following things must be true:

1. Unlike in other professional fields (medicine, nursing, law, etc.), there do not need to be measurable standards (as measured by standardized exams) required to achieve licensure in behavioral health.
2. Standardized exams for behavioral health professionals cannot be written in an unbiased way.
3. Test-takers of color cannot perform equivalently with their White counterparts on even unbiased standardized exams.
4. We must make sure that access to education and exam preparation resources are distributed equitably to promote equitable outcomes on standardized exams.





# Exam Preparation

- Across a range of educational testing, three particular things have been demonstrated to improve outcomes the most:
  - **Early access.** The best time to start preparing for licensure exams is today. Most successful test-takers prepare for 3–9 months, but preparation can start as early as during grad school.
  - **Realistic practice.** Practice doesn't make perfect; perfect practice makes perfect.
  - **Accountability partners.** Whether a study group or a 1:1 coach, having someone in your corner can help you stay on track with your preparation.



# Triad Exam Prep Details

Triad offers exam prep solutions for aspiring psychologists, social workers, marriage & family therapists, counselors, and behavior analysts.

Available in live online, self-study online, and print formats, the Triad family of brands provides exam prep options that meet all learners' needs and preferences.



Exam prep packages and a la carte options available



# Exam Prep Pass Guarantee

Pass rate claims exist in the exam prep industry, but unlike other companies, we don't make them. We believe that the only pass rate that matters is yours.

While most of our students pass on their first try, we know that some will need additional preparation (and an additional attempt), so we stand behind our products with a Pass Guarantee.



Pass Guarantee available on all comprehensive packages



# ► **Doing Our Part**







# Triad Values

- Triad's organizing principles:
  - **Purpose:** We help people help people.
  - **Mission:** We serve the mental health and substance use professional community, from student to practitioner.
  - **Strategy:** We provide education, community, and career resources for mental health and substance use professionals, organizations, and employers.
- ...and that's all people helping all people: like in any field, representation matters, both to the professionals in this space and to those seeking mental health and substance use services.
- At Triad, we are committed to promoting a diverse behavioral health workforce. That starts with working towards more equitable outcomes on licensure exams.





# Content Authoring & Evaluation

- In addition to hiring a diverse team of subject matter experts to author our exam prep and continuing education content, we perform item-level statistical analysis on our content to make sure that it is as high-quality and bias-free as possible.
  - Classical Test Theory (CTT)
  - Item Response Theory (IRT)
  - Differential Item Functioning (DIF)





# Partnerships

- Triad works with universities, employers, and organizations to ensure we are reaching all populations of test-takers and professionals.
  - **Universities:** ~300 university partners, providing a full suite of Assessment Solutions (not just exam prep, but exam-blueprint- and accreditation-aligned content integrated into their curriculum)
  - **Employers:** ~100 employer partners, providing a full suite of Employer Solutions (exam prep, continuing education, and Jobs Marketplace)
  - **Organizations:** ~50 organization partners, providing discounted access to their members on all Triad products through our partnership.





## Triad + National Council Partnership

Triad has partnered with the National Council for the past three years. In October 2022, we announced the expansion of our partnership to the Gold tier.

Through our partnership, National Council member organizations receive exclusive discounts on all Triad products and services, including 30% off employer-paid exam prep, and/or 20% off exam prep for employee self-pay, available at no cost to the organization itself.





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