

135C.6 License required — exemptions.

1. A person or governmental unit acting severally or jointly with any other person or governmental unit shall not establish or operate a health care facility in this state without a license for the facility. A supported community living service, as defined in [section 249A.38B](#), is not required to be licensed under [this chapter](#), but is subject to approval under [section 249A.38B](#) in order to receive public funding.

2. A health care facility suitable for separation and operation with distinct parts may, where otherwise qualified in all respects, be issued multiple licenses authorizing various parts of such facilities to be operated as health care facilities of different license categories.

3. No change in a health care facility, its operation, program, or services, of a degree or character affecting continuing licensure shall be made without prior approval thereof by the department. The department may by rule specify the types of changes which shall not be made without its prior approval.

4. No department, agency, or officer of this state or of any of its political subdivisions shall pay or approve for payment from public funds any amount or amounts to a health care facility under any program of state aid in connection with services provided or to be provided an actual or prospective resident in a health care facility, unless the facility has a current license issued by the department and meets such other requirements as may be in effect pursuant to law.

5. No health care facility established and operated in compliance with law prior to January 1, 1976, shall be required to change its corporate or business name by reason of the definitions prescribed in [section 135C.1](#), provided that no health care facility shall at any time represent or hold out to the public or to any individual that it is licensed as, or provides the services of, a health care facility of a type offering a higher grade of care than such health care facility is licensed to provide. Any health care facility which, by virtue of [this section](#), operates under a name not accurately descriptive of the type of license which it holds shall clearly indicate in any printed advertisement, letterhead, or similar material, the type of license or licenses which it has in fact been issued. No health care facility established or renamed after January 1, 1976, shall use any name indicating that it holds a different type of license than it has been issued.

6. A health care facility operated by and for the exclusive use of members of a religious order, which does not admit more than two individuals to the facility from the general public, may be operated without obtaining a license under [this chapter](#) and shall not be deemed to be licensed by the state.

7. A freestanding hospice facility which operates a hospice program in accordance with [42 C.F.R. §418](#) may be operated without obtaining a license under [this chapter](#) and shall not be deemed to be licensed by the state.

8. The following residential programs to which the department of health and human services applies accreditation, certification, or standards of review shall not be required to be licensed as a health care facility under [this chapter](#):

a. Residential programs providing care to not more than four individuals and receiving moneys appropriated to the department of health and human services under provisions of a federally approved home and community-based services waiver for persons with an intellectual disability or other medical assistance program under [chapter 249A](#). In approving a residential program under this paragraph, the department of health and human services shall consider the geographic location of the program so as to avoid an overconcentration of such programs in an area. In order to be approved under this paragraph, a residential program shall not be required to involve the conversion of a licensed residential care facility for persons with an intellectual disability.

b. Not more than forty residential care facilities for persons with an intellectual disability that are licensed to serve not more than five individuals may be authorized by the department of health and human services to convert to operation as a residential program under the provisions of a medical assistance home and community-based services waiver for persons with an intellectual disability. A converted residential program operating under this

paragraph is subject to the conditions stated in paragraph “a” except that the program shall not serve more than five individuals.

c. A residential program approved by the department of health and human services pursuant to this paragraph “c” to receive moneys appropriated to the department of health and human services under provisions of a federally approved home and community-based services habilitation or waiver program may provide care to not more than five individuals. The department shall approve a residential program under this paragraph that complies with all of the following conditions:

(1) Approval of the program will not result in an overconcentration of such programs in an area.

(2) The county in which the residential program is located submits to the department of health and human services a letter of support for approval of the program.

(3) The county in which the residential program is located provides to the department of health and human services verification in writing that the program is needed to address one or more of the following:

(a) The quantity of services currently available in the county is insufficient to meet the need.

(b) The quantity of affordable rental housing in the county is insufficient.

(c) Implementation of the program will cause a reduction in the size or quantity of larger congregate programs.

9. Contingent upon the department of health and human services receiving federal approval, a residential program which serves not more than eight individuals and is licensed as an intermediate care facility for persons with an intellectual disability may surrender the facility license and continue to operate under a federally approved medical assistance home and community-based services waiver for persons with an intellectual disability, if the department of health and human services has approved a plan submitted by the residential program.

10. Notwithstanding [section 135C.9](#), nursing facilities which are accredited by the joint commission shall be licensed without inspection by the department, if the nursing facility has chosen to be inspected by the joint commission in lieu of inspection by the department.*

[C50, 54, §135C.2; C58, 62, 66, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §135C.6]

[85 Acts, ch 141, §2](#); [86 Acts, ch 1245, §1113](#); [90 Acts, ch 1107, §2](#); [92 Acts, ch 1043, §3](#); [96 Acts, ch 1053, §2](#); [97 Acts, ch 169, §18, 26](#); [98 Acts, ch 1181, §11, 14](#); [99 Acts, ch 160, §17](#); [2002 Acts, ch 1120, §1](#); [2003 Acts, ch 101, §2, 4](#); [2010 Acts, ch 1031, §390](#); [2012 Acts, ch 1019, §15, 16](#); [2012 Acts, ch 1138, §49](#); [2013 Acts, ch 23, §1](#); [2013 Acts, ch 30, §33](#); [2023 Acts, ch 19, §170](#); [2024 Acts, ch 1161, §23, 137](#); [2025 Acts, ch 86, §53](#)

Referred to in [§135.62, 135C.9](#)

*Subsection 10 is effective contingent upon passage of federal legislation; see [96 Acts, ch 1053, §3](#)

2024 amendment to subsection 1 effective July 1, 2025; [2024 Acts, ch 1161, §137](#)

Subsections 1 and 10 amended