



How to Choose the Right California Agency License

California separates non-medical home care, skilled home health, and hospice into distinct licensing paths overseen by different state programs. Current moratoria also affect whether new Home Health Agency and Hospice licenses may be pursued.

Home Care Organization (HCO)

An HCO is the primary path for an agency arranging non-medical home care services, including companionship, homemaker support, and assistance with activities of daily living. HCOs are licensed by the California Department of Social Services, Home Care Services Branch. Affiliated Home Care Aides must meet registration and background-check requirements.

The application framework includes ownership information, job descriptions, personnel policies, a training plan, a program description, insurance, and an employee dishonesty bond. Agency documents and marketing should remain within a non-medical scope.

Home Health Agency (HHA)

An HHA is the clinical pathway for an organization that provides or arranges skilled nursing in a patient's residence, along with other home health services included in its approved model. California Department of Public Health licensure is separate from Medicare certification and payer enrollment.

California has prohibited new HHA licenses and branch approvals since June 29, 2026. An applicant must first request an exception and demonstrate unmet need based on existing HHA services in the proposed area. A standard initial application is not routinely available during the moratorium.

Hospice Agency

Hospice is a separate interdisciplinary model focused on palliative care and support during the last phases of life. California requires a Hospice Agency license and specific clinical and management personnel.

The new-license moratorium remains active. Applicants begin with an exception request based on geographic need. Emergency regulations effective June 22, 2026 added requirements for service areas, management personnel, and office space.

Current California alert

- HCO applications remain available through the CDSS Home Care Services Branch.
- New HHA licenses and branch additions are under a moratorium effective June 29, 2026, subject to an exception process.
- New hospice licenses remain under a moratorium, with exceptions based on demonstrated geographic need.
- Hospice emergency regulations have been effective since June 22, 2026.

Questions to consider

- Will the agency provide non-medical assistance, skilled nursing or therapy, or end-of-life hospice care?
- Do the planned employees, clinical leaders, and supervisors fit the model?
- Will the agency pursue private pay, Medicare, Medi-Cal, managed care, or another payer?
- Is the desired license currently open to standard applications, or is an exception required?
- Do the application, policies, location, staffing plan, and marketing describe the same services?

One California distinction

A Home Care Aide registration belongs to the worker; it does not replace the organization's HCO license. Medicare or Medi-Cal enrollment also does not replace state licensure. Each approval serves a different purpose.

Choose the path before building

Define the services, staffing, clients, payment sources, and office plan first. The least complicated license is not always the license that authorizes the services in your business plan.

Not sure which California path fits your agency?

NorthEnd Consulting helps California agency owners clarify their services, understand current restrictions, and prepare for the path that applies.

Visit northendconsultants.com to discuss your licensing plan

Current as of October 2026. Licensing, exception, certification, and enrollment decisions are controlled by applicable authorities. This is a general planning resource; requirements may change and depend on the proposed services. NorthEnd Consulting does not guarantee approval.