

# Peer support services

## History of Medicaid certified peers in Washington State

Washington State has offered Certified Peer Counselor trainings since 2005. The State prides itself as one of the first 11 states to deliver peer service, using Medicaid funding.

Initially, the State authorized peer support services for mental health populations only. The expansion of Substance Use Disorder (SUD) CPC services provides access for people in recovery from substance use disorders as a Medicaid benefit. Licensed community behavioral health agencies which provide substance use treatment can offer CPC services under the Medicaid State plan as of July 1, 2019.

### Peer services explained

Certified Peer Counseling (CPC) is an approved Medicaid service in Washington State. The service pairs individuals in recovery with trained CPCs who share their life experiences. CPCs work with their peers (adults and youth) and the parents of children receiving behavioral health services. CPCs draw upon their experiences to help their peers find hope and make progress toward recovery through shared understanding, building rapport, and empowerment. CPCs work with individuals to; identify and work towards meeting their own goals, overcome barriers, build community and relationships, sharing resources, and building skills including self-advocacy.

### Medicaid reimbursement for SUD peer services

As of July 1, 2019, peer support services are included in both the mental health and substance use sections of the Medicaid State Plan. This allows appropriately licensed behavioral health agencies to provide peer support services for both mental health and substance use disorders..

### DBHR Certified Peer Counselor program

Under the Medicaid State Plan, Medicaid reimbursable peer support services may only be provided by Certified Peer Counselors working for contracted behavioral health agencies. The Health Care Authority's Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) certifies peer counselors who have met the state requirements, taken the approved class, and passed the state test. To qualify as a peer counselor a person must have lived experience as a

consumer of behavioral health services (mental health or substance use treatment) or be the parent or legal guardian of a child who has received behavioral health services.

### The process to become a Certified Peer Counselor:

1. Complete an online prerequisite course.
2. Complete an application and be approved.
3. Complete the required DBHR approved CPC training.
4. Pass an oral and written exam.
5. Become credentialed as an Agency-Affiliated Counselor (or other counselor credential) through DOH.

For more detailed information on the DBHR peer certification and training program, please visit our [HCA/DBHR peer support program website](#).

### Certified Peer Counselor (CPC) curriculum

The CPC curriculum has been revised to effectively train peers throughout the behavioral health system, including mental health and substance use peers. The Standard and the Youth and Family CPC trainings are 36-40 hours of in person training. The trainings cover topics such as recovery principles, telling your story, trauma informed peer support, ethics and boundaries, cultural competence, goal setting, and documentation. The trainings and testing events have been transitioned to a virtual format. This transition has allowed the Peer Support program to continue to provide peer certification and meet the needs of the behavioral health community in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) certification

Peers who have completed the online and in person training requirements qualify to take the written and oral Certified Peer Counselor (CPC) state exams. Qualified applicants then receive a letter of certification from the DBHR peer support program. Once employed, the CPC will provide the letter of certification to their employer and apply to DOH for an Agency Affiliated Counselor credential.



## Bridge Training for recovery coaches who would like to be Certified Peer Counselors

Many people in the substance use recovery community have successfully completed the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery training (CCAR). The CCAR training is similar to the CPC training. In order to utilize recovery coaches in the behavioral health workforce, there is a modified “Bridge Training” available for recovery coaches who have lived experience or are parents of a child who has received behavioral health services. A recovery coach who successfully completes the bridge training will qualify to test for the CPC certification.

## Certified Peer Counselor (CPC) Continuing education opportunities

The Peer Support program supports the peer workforce by providing online continuing education on the following recovery topics. Four different Trauma Informed Approach trainings are available for the following audiences; everyone, agency leaders, agency staff, and supervisors. The Supportive Housing and Supportive Employment trainings focus on the roles housing and employment play in recovery and provides information on available programs, services and resources. The Intersection of Behavioral Health and the Law focuses on the forensic mental health system and how CPCs can support individuals involved in the criminal court system. All of these trainings are intended for certified peer counselor and also can provide helpful information for anyone interested in increasing their knowledge about recovery supports. These trainings are available on [the HCA Peer Support webpage](#).

## Operationalizing Peer Support (OPS)

Technical assistance training is available to behavioral health agencies who are interested in providing Peer Services. Operationalizing Peer Support is offered at no cost to agencies. Technical assistance is tailored to the needs of each organization and may include topics such as peer services implementation, hiring practices, supervision or documentation. [The Peer Workforce Alliance website has more information](#).

## Authority

Peer support services are included in the Washington Medicaid State Plan. Community behavioral health agencies are certified to provide services under [WAC 246-341-0724](#). In 2018, the Legislature expanded of peer support to include peer support services in substance use treatment.

## Numbers Served

In SFY 2020, 498 people were trained as certified peer counselors and 467 were certified; 135 of those were trained in the youth and family peer counselor trainings and 63 in Substance Use Peer project trainings.

In the SFY 2020 a total of 399 hours of in person continuing education was offered to all certified peer counselors in the state; 367 hours of technical assistance in operationalizing peer support was provided to the 10 regions, including several tribal organizations.

DBHR sponsors an annual conference and 397 peers and interested parties registered for the 2020 Peer Pathways Conference. The conference was successfully held virtually due to COVID-19.

## Budget

### Mental Health Peer Support Program

FFY20 budget: \$811,750 (MHGB)

### Substance Use Peer Support Program

FFY20 budget: \$521,300 (SABG)

## For more information

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