

Peer Support Certification and Workforce Development

Background

As one of the first 11 states to use Medicaid funding for peer support services, Washington state has proudly offered Certified Peer Counselor (CPC) training since 2005.

The State initially added peer support services for mental health; however, the program has expanded services to include substance use disorder (SUD) CPC services as a Medicaid benefit. Licensed community behavioral health agencies that provide SUD treatment can offer CPC services under the state Medicaid plan as of July 1, 2019.

Program overview

Certified Peer Counseling (CPC) is an approved Medicaid service in Washington State. The service pairs individuals in recovery with CPCs who share their life experiences. CPCs work with youth or adult peers and/or parents/guardians of children receiving behavioral health services.

CPCs draw upon their experiences to inspire peers to find hope and make progress toward recovery through shared understanding, rapport, and empowerment. CPCs help individuals to identify and work towards meeting their own goals, overcome barriers, build community and relationships, share resources, and build skills like self-advocacy while in treatment and recovery.

Peer certification and training

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, completed 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.

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To become a Certified Peer Counselor:

- Complete the online prerequisite course
- Complete the online application and be approved
- Complete and pass the DBHR-approved CPC training
- Pass the oral and written exams

For more information on the DBHR Peer Certification and Training Program, please visit our [HCA peer support program webpage](#).

Certified Peer Counselor curriculum

DBHR offers three different core CPC trainings that result in the same certification:

- "The Standard Certified Peer Counselor Training," 36 hours
- "The Youth and Family Certified Peer Counselor Training," 36 hours
- "The Bridge Training," 24 hours

All curricula are intended to train peers under the behavioral health system with thorough knowledge of both mental health issues and substance use abuse. Training topics covered include recovery principles, telling your story, trauma-informed peer support, ethics and boundaries, cultural competence, goal setting, and documentation. All core trainings are provided via in-person and virtual formats.

Peers who have successfully completed the 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 HCA Peer Support Program. Once employed, the CPC will provide the letter of certification to their employer and if applicable to their position, apply to DOH for a Registered Agency Affiliated Counselor credential.

Bridge training for recovery coaches wishing to be Certified Peer Counselors

To employ recovery coaches in the behavioral health workforce to provide Medicaid reimbursable peer services, a modified "bridge training" is available for recovery coaches who also have lived

experience or are parents of a child who has received behavioral health services.

Many in the substance use disorder recovery community have successfully completed the Connecticut Community for Addiction Recovery training (CCAR). Bridge Training covers the peer support competencies that are not provided in the CCAR training, such as documentation. A recovery coach who takes the bridge training will qualify to test for the CPC certification.

Certified Peer Counselor continuing education opportunities

The Peer Support Program provides the peer workforce online continuing education courses. These courses cover various recovery topics to include:

- Trauma-Informed Approach
- Supportive housing
- Supported employment
- Documenting peer support
- Ethics and boundaries in peer support
- Enhancing cultural intelligence and
- The power of peer support in crisis services
- The intersection of behavioral health and the law

These training opportunities are intended for CPCs, but they do provide helpful information for anyone interested in increasing their knowledge of recovery supports. These are available for a general audience as well as agency leaders, staff, and supervisors. Information about these trainings can be found on [the HCA Peer Support webpage](#).

A 40-hour continuing education training course for CPCs who work in crisis settings is available to current CPCs. Priority will be given to CPCs who work in crisis settings. The training, “Crisis and Awareness in Peer Support,” was developed and vetted in collaboration with internal and external stakeholders.

Operationalizing peer support

Technical assistance training is available to behavioral health agencies interested in providing Peer Services. Operationalizing Peer Support training is offered at no cost to agencies. Technical assistance is tailored to the needs of each

organization and may include topics like peer services implementation, hiring practices, supervision, or documentation. For more information on OPS, [visit HCA’s peer support page](#).

Medicaid reimbursement for SUD peer services

Since July 1, 2019, peer support services are included in the mental health and substance use sections of the Medicaid State Plan. Appropriately licensed behavioral health agencies can provide peer support services for mental health and substance use disorders.

Authority and oversight

Peer support services are included in the Washington Medicaid State Plan. Community behavioral health agencies are certified to provide services under [WAC 246-341-0700](#).

In 2019, the Legislature expanded the use of peer support to include peer services in substance use treatment.

The Washington Health Care Authority’s Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (HCA DBHR) has authority to ensure compliance.

Program outcomes

In the 2023 state fiscal year, 1245 people were trained as certified peer counselors. Of that number, 317 were trained as youth or family partners and 589 were identified as having a substance use disorder.

This same year, over 80 hours of operationalizing peer support technical assistance were provided to the 10 regions.

HCA in partnership with the Department of Corrections, began offering the standard CPC training to incarcerated individuals who will be returning citizens within 12 months of training.

Budget

Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2023

Mental Health Block Grant: \$946,250

Substance Use Block Grant: \$750,800

State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2023

General fund state: \$285,600

FFY2024

Mental Health Block Grant: \$811,750 (MHGB)

Substance Use Block Grant: \$521,300

SFY2024

General fund state: \$3,605,000

General fund federal: \$1,539,000

More information

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