

# Peer Support program

## Overview

In Washington, peer counseling is an approved Medicaid service that pairs individuals in recovery with trained counselors who share their life experiences. Certified peer counselors provide recovery supports in a variety of behavioral health settings including but not limited to community behavioral health agencies, peer run agencies, homeless outreach programs, evaluation and treatment programs and hospitals. Peer services increase empowerment, champion hope, and promote the expectation that recovery is possible for everyone.

Washington's Peer Support program has trained and qualified mental health consumers as certified peer counselors since 2005. A "consumer" is someone who has applied for, is eligible for, or who has received mental health services. This also includes parents and legal guardians when they have a child under the age of 13, or a child 13 or older and they are involved in their treatment plan. The Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) is in the process of expanding to include individuals with lived experience in substance use treatment.

### Peer support certification and training

DBHR oversees the certified peer counselor training program. This certification process consists of an application review, online pre-requisite course, a 36-hour in-person training, and a written and oral exam. The team processes all applications and issues test results for all approved trainings. Training events occur throughout the state either through a DBHR-contracted provider or through regional behavioral health organizations (BHOs). Once the person passes the test, they must register with the Department of Health as an agency-affiliated counselor.

The Peer Support program supports the peer workforce by providing continuing education on critical recovery topics such as: Trauma Informed Care, WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plans), Ethics, Culture, and Suicide Prevention. DBHR sponsors an annual conference and 350 peers and

interested parties attended the 2018 Peer Pathways conference held in SeaTac. In addition, an online continuing education course in supportive housing and supported employment is now available for peer counselors. In addition, DBHR sponsors extensive training and technical assistance to agencies to operationalize peer support services within their service delivery system. Technical assistance was requested in nine regions of the State.

The efforts to develop training and certification for expansion to include peer services for the substance use treatment system included a stakeholder workgroup, national technical assistance, focus groups, initial curriculum revisions, and pilot project trainings. Planning and development has led to certification trainings and agency technical assistance to begin January 2019 in preparation for the Medicaid State Plan amendment change in mid-2019.

### Authority

Peer support services are included in the Washington Medicaid State Plan. Community behavioral health agencies are certified to provide services under WAC 388-877A-0340. In 2018, the Legislature expanded of peer support to include peer support services in substance use treatment.

### Numbers served

In 2018, 454 people were trained as certified peer counselors; 139 of those were trained in the youth and family peer counselor classes and 52 in the substance use peer pilot project trainings.

A total of 343 hours of continuing education is offered. A total of 129 hours of technical assistance in operationalizing peer support was requested from nine regions, including several tribal organizations.

### Budget

**Mental Health Peer Support Program**  
2018 FY budget: \$650, 000

2019 FY budget: \$800,000

**Substance Use Peer Support Program**

2018 FY Budget: \$806,300

**Key partners**

BHOs and local agencies provide regional training events. Currently, 275 agencies in Washington are certified to provide peer services.

**For more information**

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