



## Peer Support Specialist Certification

**What is Peer Support?** Peer Support is a relationship of mutual learning founded on the key principles of hope, equality, respect, personal responsibility and self-determination; the services provided are evidence-based, nontraditional, therapeutic interactions between people who have a shared lived experience of a behavioral health challenge<sup>1</sup> or the shared experience as a parent/family member of a person with a behavioral health challenge.

Further, Peer Support is about understanding another’s situation empathically, as a person with lived experience or family member. When people find affiliation with another whom they feel is “like” them, they feel a connection. This non-pathologizing connection or affiliation is a deep, holistic understanding based on mutual experience where people are able to “be” with each other without the constraints of the traditional expert/patient or expert/family member relationship.

*Studies demonstrate that the use of peer support specialists reduces hospitalizations and hospital stays, improve client functioning, increase client satisfaction, reduces family concerns, alleviates depression and other symptoms, and enhances self-advocacy.*

Peer Support is designed to:

- Inspire hope that recovery and increased resiliency is not only possible but probable.
- Promote empowerment and self-determination.
- Create understanding of challenges and tools for overcoming challenges.
- Develop wellness skills and resiliency that allow individuals and families to achieve personal wellness.
- Allow members of the peer or family member community to try out new behaviors with one another and move beyond previously held self-limiting beliefs.
- Support non-peer support staff in identifying program environments that are conducive to wellness/recovery/resiliency and to lend their unique insight into behavioral health challenges and severe emotional disturbance as well as what makes recovery and resiliency possible.

Peer Support is provided to individuals or groups in a variety of settings, including but not limited to:

- County clinics
- Community Based Organizations
- Peer Operated Centers and Programs
- Natural community settings including personal residences
- In-patient settings
- Community service agencies including schools, courts and primary care

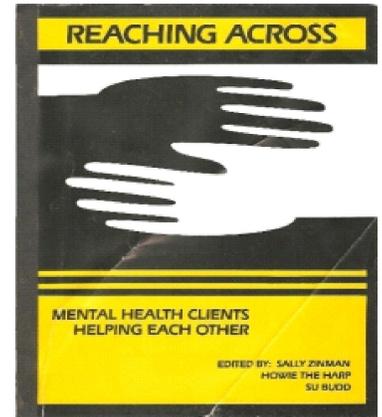
### What is a Peer Specialist?

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<sup>1</sup> “Behavioral health” refers to both mental health and substance abuse issues.



- A Peer Specialist is someone who, first and foremost, has experiential knowledge themselves or as a parent or family member of the healing process of recovery/building resiliency and can offer genuine empathy for the struggles people experience, and hope that it is possible to come through those struggles stronger, with more clarity and purpose, A peer specialists respects each individual’s personal journey toward recovery.
- A practitioner who strategically utilizes their own personal recovery or family resiliency stories to support persons served to overcome barriers or struggles caused by behavioral health challenge
- A practitioner who uses language and behaviors that support a relationship of mutuality and power sharing.
- A practitioner who provides services in a culturally relevant manner and assumes a position of cultural humility in their interactions with others.
- A change agent in transforming the system to improve outcomes through the increased use of effective engagement to reduce the use of involuntary care and increase wellness, recovery, resiliency-based voluntary services so that people served and families will become integrated and supported by their communities and be empowered to access the services that best serve their needs and/or to exit the public system of care.
- A practitioner who is trauma responsive.



Studies demonstrate that the use of peer support specialists reduces hospitalizations and hospital stays, improve client functioning, increases client satisfaction, reduces family concerns, alleviates depression and other symptoms, and enhances self-advocacy.<sup>2</sup> In fact, in 2007, the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) sent a guidance letter to all State Medicaid Directors emphasizing, “peer support services are an evidence-based mental health model of care which consists of a qualified peer support provider who assists individuals with their recovery from mental illness and substance use disorders.”<sup>3</sup>

*Peer Certification creates a practice that is distinguished from other disciplines within the behavioral health workforce that provides services from the perspective of shared experience, as well as the values of mutuality and shared power.*

#### **What is Peer Support Specialist Certification (Peer Certification)?**

Peer Certification creates a practice that is distinguished from other disciplines within the behavioral health workforce that provides services from the perspective of shared experience, as well as the values of mutuality and shared power

- Peer Support is a specific discipline that requires training to achieve competency.
- Peer support services are different than other existing mental health services in how they are provided.
- A Peer Support Specialist is a person with lived experience who has been trained to provide the specific service of peer support, although people with lived experience or family members may provide other existing mental health

<sup>2</sup> **Individuals with Serious Mental Illness: Assessing the Evidence.** Psychiatric Services, 65:429-441.

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. (August 15, 2007.) **Guidance Letter to State Medicaid Directors, SMDL #07-011.**

<http://downloads.cms.gov/cmsgov/archived-downloads/SMDL/downloads/SMD081507A.pdf>



services such as rehabilitation, collaterals, and case management.

- A Peer Support Specialist Certification is needed to ensure;
  - ❖ Understanding of the role and scope of practice of Peer Support
  - ❖ Legitimacy of the role and service
  - ❖ Competency of the provider
  - ❖ Consistency across the system and between counties
  - ❖ The ability to bill Medi-Cal for the service

#### **How widespread is the prevalence of Peer Support Specialists Certification?**

44 States and the Department of Veteran Affairs have established programs for the certification of peers. The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid released an advisory in 2007 for establishing a certification program for peers to enable the use of federal Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California) financial participation with a 50% match. California stakeholders have done extensive work in preparing California to establish peer certification. There is a strong Peer Certification movement in California supported by most of the behavioral health community. But California has not acted.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This Issue Brief is based on two previous briefs: Working Well Together, Training and Technical Assistance Center. (June 2014.) **Peer Support Specialists Certification Information Brief**; Office of Senator Mark Leno. (August 2015.) **SB 614 (Leno) As Amended July 16, 2015, Peer, Parent, Transition-Age, and Family Support Specialist Certification, Fact Sheet.**



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## Issue Brief

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#### Resource Guide

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Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, BRINGING RECOVERY SUPPORTS TO SCALE Technical Assistance Center Strategy (BRSS TACS). (December, 2015.) **Core Competencies for Peer Workers in Behavioral Health Services,** [http://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs\\_campaigns/brss\\_tacs/core-competencies.pdf](http://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tacs/core-competencies.pdf).

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[http://www.cibhs.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/certification\\_of\\_peer\\_support\\_final\\_7-23-14.pdf](http://www.cibhs.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/certification_of_peer_support_final_7-23-14.pdf)

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