



# California Mental Health Services Authority

## Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

**December 29, 2021**

A huge acknowledgment to all for the many years of advocacy for the successful passing of Senate Bill 803 and to those who offer your invaluable input into the development of a Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification program by CalMHSA. CalMHSA is committed to leveraging resources and implement programs on behalf of county mental health and behavioral health systems to best support their efforts in meeting the behavioral health needs of California's diverse communities.

This list of frequently asked questions are representative of the most common questions we have received through CalMHSA's Community Input Sessions, CalMHSA's Stakeholder Advisory Council, and via the [PeerCertification@calmhsa.org](mailto:PeerCertification@calmhsa.org) email. This list will be updated and posted to our website based on community inquiry and available information. We at CalMHSA seek to include stakeholder input throughout the program development and implementation.

Any additional information directly related to the Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification standards and additional information on Peer Support Specialist can be found on the [DHCS website](#).



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### Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification

**Q. When will the Peer Support Specialist Certification program go live?**

**A.** The prospective start for individuals to begin the application process to become a Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist is May 2022.

**Q. Is the Medi-Cal Peer Certification going to be required for all future applicants prior to getting hired as a peer support specialist?**

**A.** CalMHSA does not have the authority to make this determination. Changes in this area would fall to the Department of Health Care Services as the authority responsible for managing the Medi-Cal programs for the state. Additionally, CalMHSA nor DHCS has authority to employer hiring practices, an employer may elect to require certification as a condition of employment.

### Existing Peer Support Workers

**Q. Can county mental health plans (MHPs) continue to bill for peer services under the “other qualified provider” category of California’s Medicaid State Plan?**

**A.** Within the county mental health plans (MHPs), peers may provide Specialty Mental Health Services (SMHS) under the “other qualified provider” category of California’s Medicaid State Plan.



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### Grandparenting/Grandfathering

#### **Q. Will current Peer Support Specialists be grandparented in to become Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists?**

**A.** As outlined in the Behavioral Health Information Notice 21-041, individuals who are employed as a peer as of January 1, 2022 can seek certification under the grandparenting standards as a Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Program granted the individual satisfies the following requirements:

Either:

- 1 year of paid or unpaid work experience (1550 hours) as a peer specialist
- AND**
- 20 hours of continuing education (CEs), including Law & Ethics. CEs can be in relevant professional competencies obtained via relevant in-state, out of state or national educational forums.

Or:

- 1550 hours in 3 years, with 500 hours completed within the last 12 months, working as a peer specialist

**AND**

- 20 hours of continuing education (CEs), including law and ethics. CEs can be in relevant professional competencies obtained via relevant in-state, out of state or national educational forums.

**AND has all the following:**

- Completion of peer training(s)
- 3 Letters of Recommendation as outlined:
  - One from a supervisor
  - One from a colleague/professional
  - One self-recommendation describing their current role and responsibilities as a peer support specialist
- Pass the Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Program Exam



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### **Q. What are the qualifications to supervise Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists?**

**A.** According to [DHCS Behavioral Health Information Notice No: 21-041](#), dated July 22, 2021, Peer Support Specialist Supervisors must meet at least one of the below qualifications:

- Have a Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Program certification; have two years of experience working in the behavioral health system; and have completed a DHCS approved peer support supervisory training curriculum.

OR

- Be a non-peer behavioral health professional (including registered & certified SUD counselors) who has worked in the behavioral health system for a minimum of two years, and has completed a DHCS approved peer support supervisory training.

OR

- Have a high school diploma or GED, four years of behavioral health direct service experience that may include peer support services; and have completed an approved peer support supervisory training curriculum.



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### Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Training

**Q. Will the certification training be available online? Will the training be offered “on-demand,” or will candidates have to attend cohort classes?**

**A.** We anticipate the training for certification to be offered online, in person, and through a hybrid model. The various delivery methods are still under consideration.

**Q. How many training organizations will be contracted to serve all of California? Will these organizations be regionally, population, or specialization focused?**

**A.** CalMHSA is currently exploring various options to ensure adequate access to training is available.

### Specializations

**Q. Will there be a specialization specifically for youth peers/mentors?**

**A.** Currently, the Department of Health Care Services has not identified youth and peer mentors as a specialization.

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### Exam

**Q. Will there be accommodations for exam takers with disabilities and will the exam be available in other languages?**

**A.** The Behavioral Health Information Notice 21-041 states that the examination leading to Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification must provide reasonable accommodations to candidates taking the examination, as needed, including verbal testing and testing in prevalent languages.

**Q. Who will develop the exam? Will CalMHSA develop the exam questions?**

**A.** CalMHSA will contract with a psychometric exam vendor who specialize in the development of ethical and unbiased exams. Additionally, CalMHSA will identify Subject Matter Experts in the field of Peer Support to inform the question development in partnership with the psychometric exam developer.

**Q. Will an exam preparation guide or information regarding the exam content areas be provided to exam candidates and trainers to support candidates in preparation for taking the exam?**

**A.** As noted in Behavioral Health Information Notice 21-041, training curriculum covers the 17-core competencies required for certification.



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### Certificant Registry

**Q.** What is a Certificant Registry?

**A.** A Certificant is an individual who has received certification as a Peer Support Specialist. Similarly to other certification registries, information on the status of a certification is made available to the public. The Certificant Registry will be developed as part of the peer certification program and will include information, such as, information on the peer certification program, information on authorized training vendors and continued education, how to apply for the examination, reporting issue and complaints, and information on the status of the Certificant's certification.



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### Medi-Cal Site Certifications

**Q. Do facilities or sites that provide Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist services have to be certified as well?**

**A.** The Department of Health Care Services is responsible for administering and monitoring of the Medi-Cal program. The delivery of Medi-Cal specialty mental health services is provided by county mental health or behavioral health plans through a contract with the Department of Health Care Services. Services are provided directly by the county or through a contractor of the county. The peer support specialist is a **new and optional benefit** for the county and therefore, these services remain the responsibility of the county. As per current regulation, all sites must be Medi-Cal certified to claim for Medi-Cal reimbursement. Because the benefit is administered at the county level, an interested entity must work directly with the county of interest for support with Medi-Cal site certification.

**Q. Once Certified, can an Peer Support Specialist be paid or reimbursed directly for services provided to another peer, much like the In-Home-Support-Services (IHHS) program?**

**A.** No. The Department of Health Care Services is responsible for administering and monitoring of the Medi-Cal program. The delivery of Medi-Cal specialty mental health services is provided by county mental health or behavioral health plans through a contract with the Department of Health Care Services. Services are provided directly by the county or through a contractor of the county. The peer support specialist is a **new and optional benefit** for the county and therefore, these services remain the responsibility of the county.





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### Miscellaneous

**Q. Will CalMHSA release job descriptions, compensation scales, or minimum standards for counties opting-in to certification?**

**A.** No. Neither, CalMHSA nor the Department of Health Care Services are authorized under law to set a pay scale for peer support specialists. Counties are responsible for setting rates of pay for county-employed peer support specialists. Some Medi-Cal peer support specialists may be employed by independent organizations or facilities that may or may not be comparable to county pay scales. The rates of pay may vary across different counties and other organizations that employ peer support specialists.

**Q. My organization submitted a proposal under the Training Vendor Request for Statement of Qualifications (RFSQ). Are vendors who applied for the RFSQ still in consideration to be potential training vendors?**

**A.** CalMHSA issued an RFSQ to gather information to inform the implementation. CalMHSA plans to issue a subsequent Request for Proposal (RFP).

**Q. Which counties have opted-in to CalMHSA's Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification program?**

**A.** CalMHSA is formally seeking Participation Agreements with counties intending to opt-in to the Medi-Cal peer support specialist benefit with the Department of Health Care Services and counties interested in representation by CalMHSA for the administration of this benefit. Information on counties under representation by CalMHSA will be posted on the CalMHSA website once available.



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**Q. CalMHSA submitted its Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Program proposal to DHCS on November 19, 2021. When will this proposal be made available to the public?**

**A.** DHCS will post all approved Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Program proposals to their website. However, information regarding the program components in the proposal were shared via an Information Session to the public on November 15, 2021. The presentation is available on the CalMHSA website.

**Q. What funding sources have been identified for preliminary start-up efforts?**

**A.** The Department of Health Care Services is committed to supporting the behavioral health workforce and certification of peers. The Department of Health Care Services has identified funding for start-up costs for the development of a process for the certification of peers. On behalf of interested counties, the California Mental Health Services Authority has submitted its certification program proposal to the Department of Health Care Services for approval.



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### **Q. How can a Stakeholder provide input into CalMHSA's program implementation process?**

**A.** CalMHSA welcomes all stakeholder input. There are several ways to provide ongoing input. Feedback may be provided through the following methods (all links available on our website):

1. Through general feedback on our [website](#).
2. \*Through a Stakeholder Advisory Council member (information on website)
3. Through public comment opportunity during an Advisory Council meeting
4. Through email to [PeerCertification@calmhsa.org](mailto:PeerCertification@calmhsa.org)

\*Please see links to provide input directly to the Stakeholder Advisory Council member for your region under the Stakeholder Advisory Council section of the Peer Certification page on our website.

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