

Peer Support Specialist: Things to Know

What is a Peer Support Specialist?

A peer support specialist, or peer, is someone with lived experience in receiving mental health or substance abuse treatment. They provide non-clinical interventions to develop and practice the skills needed to support a participant's recovery. Peers work with and support participants to help them achieve their desired results.

Certification Standards and Requirements:

- 80 hours of training from Health Care Authority in providing peer services to participants.
- Obtained 1,000 hours of supervised experience as a peer support specialist trainee.
- Pass a state or federal background check.



Why do peers refer to their clients as “participants?”

Peer services is a mutual process and involves collaboration from both the participant and peer. The participants lead their care while the peers provide the interventions to help them achieve their goals. Peers may work with the participants in various parts of their lives. The focus is to help participants and not direct them. The goal is to use collaboration to remove the power imbalance between a peer and participant.

What types of services can a peer support specialist provide?

Peers can help participants treat and manage their symptoms through interventions, such as:

- Develop and practice skills to support the participant's recovery.
- Social connection, recovery, and self-advocacy.
- Guidance in developing community supports and basic daily living skills.
- Supporting the engagement, motivation, and maintenance of health and wellness goals.

How do peer support specialists interact with other health care professionals?

Peers can help participants access healthcare providers, such as mental health or substance use disorder counselors. But peers do not take direction from these providers to achieve the provider's goals. Peers work with participants on their treatment goals, **not** the provider's goals.

Are peer services covered under insurance or Medicaid?

Medicaid covers peer services. Private insurance may cover peer services. It is up private insurance companies if they choose to cover peer services and what the rates are.

How do I find a peer support specialist?

Peers work in a variety of settings. You may already have some available to you. You may find peers in behavioral health agencies, hospitals, and independent practices. There are peer-specific organizations that only provide peer-specific services too. The Department of Health (DOH) currently does not have a list of providers. Peer organizations and health care providers are a great resource to look for a peer or peer services near you.

What should I consider when looking for and choosing a peer support specialist to work with me?

The peer support specialist you work with should have similar lived experiences to you. You should feel comfortable working with them. Peers may also work with your family or support group. Peers work outside of clinical settings to meet participants where they are. Finding someone relatable that you can talk with is important.

What can I do if there is a problem or concern with the peer I'm working with?

If you have a concern about your peer support specialist or the services they provide, you have several options:

- If they are a trainee, you can reach out to their approved supervisor.
- If they work in a behavioral health agency, you may reach out to them or your healthcare provider.
- If you feel like they have violated the law, then you can file a complaint with DOH to investigate the situation. You may file a complaint on our website:

www.doh.wa.gov/about-us/file-complaint.

Remember: We encourage your involvement in developing goals, requesting a change in approach to services, or decisions about terminating services.

If for any reason you are unable to resolve a concern with your counselor or adviser, you may file a complaint with the Department of Health. **Contact the Customer Service Center for assistance:**

360-236-4700

www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa

Fax: 360-236-4818

hsqa.csc@doh.wa.gov



Learn more about peer support specialists.



Provider Credential Search