



# The Peer Workforce

Peer Support is a rapidly growing workforce. This evidence-based practice improves outcomes and quality of life and reduces hospitalizations and cost of services for consumers. Through its focus on empowerment, mutuality, and the whole person, it has the power to fundamentally change how we approach and engage people around their mental health and wellbeing.

By expanding access to peer support and including peer supporters in decision making, we can create a system of services that empower individuals with the support and information they need to live their best lives in their communities of choice.

Below is information on workforce issues in peer support:

- [Peer Workforce Overview](#)
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## **Peer Workforce Overview:**

Current workforce estimates show over 30,000 peer supporters working around the US. With a growing [research base \(http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/peer-support-research-and-reports\)](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/peer-support-research-and-reports) for peers and the growing demand for behavioral health services generally, peer support is expanding both in numbers and in the settings in which peers serve people. Peers can be seen in inpatient psychiatric units, emergency departments, peer-run organizations, telehealth, outpatient services, and more.

Peer support fits naturally into the current trends in healthcare. With a focus on the entire person and empowering individuals to take ownership of their own wellbeing, peers help those they support to stay engaged in monitoring and improving their overall health. Because peers improve quality of life and outcomes and reduce the use of the most restrictive levels of care, peers offer a strong return on investment by using resources to prevent and reduce hospitalization and other high-cost services.

More information on the peer support workforce:

- [Peer Specialist Training & Certification Programs: National Overview 2016](http://sites.utexas.edu/mental-health-institute/files/2017/01/Peer-Specialist-Training-and-Certification-Programs-A-National-Overview-2016-Update-1.5.17.pdf) (<http://sites.utexas.edu/mental-health-institute/files/2017/01/Peer-Specialist-Training-and-Certification-Programs-A-National-Overview-2016-Update-1.5.17.pdf>) (includes a summary of individuals working in peer support in each state), Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health, School of Social Work, the University of Texas at Austin (2017)

### **Peer Support Certification:**

The vast majority of states now have certification for peer specialists. Certification helps standardize training and scope of practice and recognizes peers as the valuable, essential part of the behavioral health workforce that they are. Certification also allows for billing of peer support services and requires ongoing learning to keep those in the field improving and updated on the latest research and best practices in the field.

As peer support expands and continues to integrate into all areas of healthcare, it is important to include levels of practice for individuals interested in creating careers in peer support. While certification lays the groundwork for peer support roles, advanced certification allows individuals to demonstrate their exceptional level of experience and knowledge and positions them to grow their careers into leadership positions and to receive compensation that reflects their value.

More information about peer support certification:

- [Peer Specialist Training & Certification Programs: National Overview 2016](http://sites.utexas.edu/mental-health-institute/files/2017/01/Peer-Specialist-Training-and-Certification-Programs-A-National-Overview-2016-Update-1.5.17.pdf) (<http://sites.utexas.edu/mental-health-institute/files/2017/01/Peer-Specialist-Training-and-Certification-Programs-A-National-Overview-2016-Update-1.5.17.pdf>) (includes a summary of peer certification process in each state), Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health, School of Social Work, University of Texas at Austin (2017)
- [Peer Specialist Database](https://copelandcenter.com/peer-specialists) (<https://copelandcenter.com/peer-specialists>) (includes an overview of peer certification process and contact information in each state), Doors to Wellbeing
- [MHA National Certified Peer Specialist \(NCPS\) Certification](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/mha-national-certified-peer-specialist-) (<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/mha-national-certified-peer-specialist->

[certification-get-certified](#)).

## **Peer Support Sample Job Descriptions:**

Part of ensuring the success of peer supporters, the individuals they support, and the organizations in which they work is establishing clear job descriptions. Because peer support is often misunderstood, job descriptions are a great way to explain what peer supporters do. They serve as an important resource if there is any conflict or confusion about their roles.

You can find a number of peer supporter job descriptions [here](#) (</sites/default/files/Peer%20Services%20Toolkit%20Appendices.docx>) from the [Peer Services Toolkit](#) ([https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/sites/default/files/Peer\\_Services\\_Toolkit%204-2015.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/sites/default/files/Peer_Services_Toolkit%204-2015.pdf)). Feel free to modify them to fit your organization's needs.

## **Peer Supervision:**

Effective supervision for peer specialists is essential to ensuring the best outcomes for peers and those they support. To provide supervision for peer supporters, supervisors must have an understanding of peer support, its history, best practices, and common concerns. If a person does not understand the role of the peer specialist, they are unlikely to offer adequate supervision and may create conflict and confusion. With appropriate training and understanding, peer supervisors should support the professional development of peers and create an environment for their supervisees to succeed in their peer roles.

More information about peer supervision:

- [Peer Supervisor Resources](#) ([https://www.peerleadershipcenter.org/plc/Supervision\\_Resources.asp](https://www.peerleadershipcenter.org/plc/Supervision_Resources.asp)), Peer Leadership Center, Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
- [Certified Peer Specialist \(CPS\) Supervisor Training](#) ([https://www.peerleadershipcenter.org/plc/Supervision\\_Resources.asp](https://www.peerleadershipcenter.org/plc/Supervision_Resources.asp)), Mental Health Partnerships
- [Training for Peer Support Supervisors](#) (<https://riinternational.com/consulting/training/for-supervisors/>), RI Consulting
- [Successfully Integrating Peer Staff: A Toolkit for Mental Health Employers](#) (<http://www.propelmha.org/peer-employer-toolkit/>), Mental Health Association of San Francisco

## **Peer Support Pay/Salary:**

Although peer support is a transformative service, peers are often stuck in low wage jobs with limited room for growth. Instead of valuing peer services for the improvements in outcomes, quality of life, and engagement they create, peers often go without living wages or the potential to create careers.

Peer support should not be considered a cost-saving service because it is “cheap labor.” Peer support is a cost-saving service because it reduces the use of the most expensive, restrictive levels of care and empowers individuals to best support their health and wellbeing in the community. As peer support expands, it is important for advocates to include living wages for peer supporters to keep people in the field and to ensure that they can care for themselves, too.

More information about peer compensation:

- [National Survey of Compensation Among Peer Support Specialists](https://papeersupportcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CPS_Compensation_Report.pdf) ([https://papeersupportcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CPS\\_Compensation\\_Report.pdf](https://papeersupportcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CPS_Compensation_Report.pdf)), The College for Behavioral Health Leadership (2016)

## **Integration of Peer Support:**

Peer support transforms systems and services, but, in order to make sure it has a large, sustainable impact, leaders and providers must adequately invest in and plan integration. Culture change is always challenging. Changing the culture by integrating peers can be especially challenging, as many do not understand the role of peers and have assumptions about what it means to be a person given a psychiatric diagnosis. Peers may be treated as junior clinicians or asked to perform tasks that are not related to their jobs. Organizations may fail to prepare or strategize around implementation and assume that peer support services do not make sense for them based on those experiences.

By utilizing the expertise of those who have succeeded and including peer supporters in leadership and decision-making positions, peer supporters, providers, leadership, individuals receiving services, and communities can experience the systems-changing impact of peer support.

More information about the integration of peer support:

- [Peer Support Toolkit](https://dbhids.org/peer-support-toolkit/) (<https://dbhids.org/peer-support-toolkit/>), Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disAbility Services (2017)

- [Best Practices for Effectively Integrating Peer Staff in the Workplace](http://www.academyofpeerservices.org/pluginfile.php/37061/mod_resource/content/1/presentation_practices_integrating_peer_staff_ja_2017.pdf) ([http://www.academyofpeerservices.org/pluginfile.php/37061/mod\\_resource/content/1/presentation\\_practices\\_integrating\\_peer\\_staff\\_ja\\_2017.pdf](http://www.academyofpeerservices.org/pluginfile.php/37061/mod_resource/content/1/presentation_practices_integrating_peer_staff_ja_2017.pdf)), New York State Office of Mental Health (2017)
- [Florida Peer Services Handbook](http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/samh/publications/peer-services/DCF-Peer-Guidance.pdf) (<http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/samh/publications/peer-services/DCF-Peer-Guidance.pdf>), Florida Department of Children and Families, Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health (2016)
- [Peer Services Toolkit: A Guide to Advancing and Implementing Peer-Run Behavioral Health Services](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/sites/default/files/Peer_Services_Toolkit%204-2015.pdf) ([https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/sites/default/files/Peer\\_Services\\_Toolkit%204-2015.pdf](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/sites/default/files/Peer_Services_Toolkit%204-2015.pdf)), ACMHA: The College for Behavioral Health Leadership (Now called the College of Behavioral Health Leadership) and Optum (2015)
- [Enhancing the Peer Provider Workforce: Recruitment, Supervision, and Retention](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/sites/default/files/Enhancing%20the%20Peer%20Provider%20Workforce%20Final%2015-14%20final.pdf), (<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/sites/default/files/Enhancing%20the%20Peer%20Provider%20Workforce%20Final%2015-14%20final.pdf>), National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (2014)

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