

Peer Support Specialists – Frequently Asked Questions

February 10, 2021

Who is responsible for administering a peer support specialist certification program under SB 803, now Welfare and Institutions Code (W&I) Div 9, Part 3, Chapter 7, Article 1.4 (commencing with Section 14045.10)?

A county, or an agency representing the county, subject to approval by DHCS, is responsible for developing, overseeing, and enforcing a peer support specialist certification program under SB 803. (W&I 14045.14) This means that, while DHCS is responsible for setting the statewide standards for peer support specialist certification programs, each county, or agency representing a county, is responsible for developing a program that is aligned with those standards, and for ensuring it is administered appropriately.

Can youth be Peer Support Specialists?

The law includes several requirements for an applicant to be certified as a Peer Support Specialist in W&I 14045.15. One such requirement is that an applicant must be at least 18 years of age. This does not preclude Peer Support Specialists working with youth or transitional age youth.

Can the term “Peer Support Specialist” be changed to “Peer Specialists”?

The term "Peer Support Specialist" is directly from statute and cannot be changed by DHCS. Peers certified or funded through a funding source other than Medi-Cal may have more flexibility.

What is the timeframe for the development of Peer Support Specialist Certification Program standards?

DHCS is required to establish certification program standards by July 1, 2022. DHCS projects to disseminate a Behavioral Health Information Notice to County Behavioral Health Agencies with these certification standards by July 2021. DHCS anticipates developing these standards earlier to provide time for county development and implementation, as well as technical assistance opportunities, from August – December 2021. For more information and updated timelines please check the [DHCS' Peer Support Services website](#)

If a peer support specialist relapses in their recovery, do they have to wait 90 days before providing peer services?

There is no state requirement, in statute, regulation, waiver, or Interagency Agreement, that individuals working as a peer specialist cannot provide services for 90 days after a relapse.

Does an individual need to wait 90 days after finishing treatment services to become a peer support specialist?

There is no state requirement, in statute, regulation, waiver or Interagency Agreement, that individuals working as a peer specialist must wait any length of time prior to providing peer specialist services.

How do I participate in stakeholder outreach for the implementation of SB 803?

Opportunities for input on implementation efforts are posted on the [DHCS' Peer Support Services website](#). Materials presented during meetings will be posted on our webpage prior to meeting dates. Interested stakeholders may also submit comments to the implementation team via email at Peers@dhcs.ca.gov.

What will the training for peer certification include?

The law states that DHCS is responsible for determining the curriculum and core competencies for certification. Specifically, the core-competencies-based curriculum must include, at a minimum, training related to all of the following elements:

1. The concepts of hope, recovery, and wellness.
2. The role of advocacy.
3. The role of consumers and family members.
4. Psychiatric rehabilitation skills and service delivery, and addiction recovery principles, including defined practices.
5. Cultural competence training.
6. Trauma-informed care.
7. Group facilitation skills.
8. Self-awareness and self-care.
9. Cooccurring disorders of mental health and substance use.
10. Conflict resolution.
11. Professional boundaries and ethics.
12. Preparation for employment opportunities, including study and test-taking skills, application and résumé preparation, interviewing, and other potential requirements for employment.
13. Safety and crisis planning.
14. Navigation of, and referral to, other services.

15. Documentation skills and standards.
16. Confidentiality.

DHCS is in the process of soliciting stakeholder feedback for the certification standards through listening sessions and the DHCS public email address: Peers@dhcs.ca.gov.

What does biennial certification renewal mean?

DHCS must determine the standards for certification renewal every two years. The law also requires the state to determine the requirements around continuing education for certification renewal.

Who is going to determine the code of ethics?

DHCS is required to establish a code of ethics by law.

If I am currently a peer specialist but don't work with Medi-Cal beneficiaries, do I need to be certified by this program?

No. This certification is only a requirement if peer support services are provided to a Medi-Cal beneficiary and the county is reimbursed by Medi-Cal for the federal share of the cost.

Will there be different certification programs for substance use disorder peers and mental health peers?

No. The law does not make a distinction as separate certifications and states a peer support specialist is an individual "...having lived experience with the process of recovery from mental illness, substance use disorder, or both, either as a consumer of these services or as the parent or family member of the consumer."