



BHS HEALTH PLAN ADMINISTRATION

Q&A on Peer Support Services

Revised on 8/30/2023 | Updates are in red font

A. Peer Support Services

1. *How will this new peer support model impact caregivers/parents of children 0-5?*

BHS: MH and SUD treatment programs serving children and families, including perinatal SUD services, with peer support specialists under the new peer support certification model, will offer supportive services to family members in support of enrolled clients. This may include engagement, education on recovery, advocacy, and assistance with navigating the service system and accessing needed services and resources.

B. Peer Support Specialists

1. *Peers seem to be mental health and SUD related; would experience with homelessness also count as a peer?*

BHS: Per [DHCS BHIN-21-041](#), certified peers would be self-identified as having experience with the process of recovery from mental illness or substance use disorder, either as a consumer of these services or as the parent, caregiver, or family member of a consumer. Homelessness in and of itself would not qualify, but homelessness is identified as an area of specialization in addition to self-identifying with the experience that will be implemented.

2. *Will you be more specific about what the grandfathering entails?*

BHS: Please [click here](#) for a copy of the BHS contractor memo regarding the legacy process for peers. This pathway for certification has been **extended** through June 30, 2023 for individuals employed as a Peer on January 1, 2022. See "[Grandparenting Certification Requirements](#)" on the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) website.

3. *What is changing for staff currently in peer roles and will all peers be required to become certified and bill Medi-Cal?*

BHS: **While it is best practice that** positions that have been identified as requiring behavioral health lived experience must be filled with Certified Peer Support Specialists who are trained and certified per the process defined on the [CalMHSA website](#), **it is important to support individuals in being able to work as soon as possible. In the DMC-ODS system, peers must be certified to use the Peer Specific codes which are the only ones available to them. However, while DHCS requires Peers to be Certified prior to billing the Peer Specific service codes, there are some non-Peer specific specialty mental health service codes that can potentially be used prior to certification. Although we are locally emphasizing the best practice approach that required peer positions are filled with Certified Peer Specialists, or certification is obtained within 90 days of hire, there is flexibility for supporting programs and individuals who cannot meet the requirements and timelines. Programs may work with the peer staff to determine if 'Other Qualified Provider' criteria is met so specialty mental health services can be delivered with the use of appropriate billing codes in the interim. For SMHS providers, OPOH Section M provides requirements for the Other Qualified Provider (aka ParaProfessional) credential and scope of practice.**

4. *Is there a particular organization that people could contact to learn more about the training curriculum specific to San Diego County?*

BHS: The State- approved Certified Peer trainings are not county specific and are available through [CalMHSA](#).

Have a new question on Peers?

- Send questions related to Behavioral Health Services Peers to bhs-hpa.hhsa@sdcounty.ca.gov



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5. *Are the Peer Employment Training Certifications of people who attended the RI-I training in the past on file somewhere after June 30, 2022?*

BHS: Individuals who are unable to locate their RI training certificate can log on to <https://riinternational.com/consulting-and-training/> and select the "contact training" option and this will continue to be an accessible/available option after the RI-I contract in San Diego terminates.

6. *One of our program managers contacted RI-I regarding the Peer Support Specialist Training and they stated that they are no longer offering Peer Employment Training, PET. The DMC-ODS Required Training Grid currently has RI-I listed. Is there another source that we should be reaching out to for Peer Support Training?*

BHS: CalMHSA published the approved Peer Training Providers on their website: [Training - CA Peer Certification](#). The [DMC-ODS Required Training Grid](#) has been updated with this information as well.

7. *What will happen to peers in DMC-ODS programs that are currently employed but are not certified by July 1, 2023?*

BHS: For DMC-ODS programs, **peers must be certified to use the Peer Specific codes which are the only ones available to them per DHCS. As such**, county-billable Case Management will no longer be applicable for non-certified peers effective July 1, 2023. Services shall only be provided by certified peers as described here: [Certified Peer Support Specialist Billing Codes](#). In addition, after June 30, 2023, DMC-ODS programs that have uncertified Peers but with SanWITS access will have their access temporarily suspended until SUDEHRSupport.HHSA@sdcounty.ca.gov has been notified of certification through a [SanWITS modification form](#). Verification and access typically follow within 24 to 48 hours of receiving notification.

C. Supervision of certified Peer Support Specialists

1. *Wording suggests that certified SUD professionals cannot supervise Peers Support Specialist; is that accurate?*

BHS: Per DHCS [BHIN-22-018](#), Peer Support Specialist Supervisor qualifications include non-peer behavioral health professionals (including registered & certified SUD counselors) who have worked in the behavioral health system for a minimum of two years, and have completed a DHCS approved peer support supervisory training.

2. *If programs bill by the bed day, do the peers need to have Medi-Cal certification and supervision?*

BHS: If a program that serves Medi-Cal beneficiaries has identified positions that require lived experience, staff filling the positions are required to be Certified Peer Support Specialist. Per DHCS BHIN [22-026](#), Certified Peer Support Specialists are to provide services under the direction of a Behavioral Health Professional. Alternatively, Certified Peer Support Specialists may be supervised by a Peer Support Specialist Supervisor who must meet the standards per DHCS BHIN [21-041](#). A program will need to work with their COR regarding staffing positions and expected roles.

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3. *Does a Peer Support Specialist Supervisor have to have completed the Supervisor training prior to supervising a certified Peer and the Peer billing?*

BHS: Per [BHIN 22-018](#), Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Supervisors must take a DHCS-approved peer support supervisory training within 60 days of beginning to supervise Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists. Supervisors must take the DHCS-approved peer support supervisory training at least once, with ongoing training incorporated into a county's regular continuing training requirements. Peer billing may begin prior to supervisor completion of training. [Supervision of Peer Workers Training](#) is a 1-hour recorded training that is now available through CalMHSA at no cost.

D. Peer Support Training and Certification

1. *Is there a solid culturally responsive component to the training or does the training ensure age-appropriate knowledge?*

BHS: CalMHSA confirmed that it is required of the Peer Training Providers' curriculum to include cultural humility as a component integrated into the totality of the training.

2. *Question: Does the training curriculum include interventions for specific age groups and/or ensure age-appropriate knowledge?*

BHS: CalMHSA confirmed the training curriculum is standardized but they cannot provide insight into the teaching approach of each training vendor. DHCS included Family Driven and Child-Centered language requirements in the final Code of Ethics each Certified Peer Support Specialists must sign and abide.

3. *For ESL learners, will the training be provided/facilitated in key languages?*

BHS: CalMHSA confirmed the Peer Training Providers were not mandated to translate their training curriculums into the 17 prevalent languages in the state of California.

4. *Are there considerations/accommodations for alternative testing methods (e.g., for peers who may have test anxiety)?*

BHS: CalMHSA confirmed ADA accommodations will be made available for peers that request them.

5. *If a peer reaches the required number of hours within the month December 2022, could they still be considered for the grandparenting process and if so, by when should they apply and/or take the exam?*

BHS: This pathway for certification has been extended through June 30, 2023 for individuals employed as a Certified Peer Support Specialist on January 1, 2022. See "[Grandparenting Certification Requirements](#)" on the CalMHSA website.

6. *Is there a list of the Peer Training Providers?*

BHS: CalMHSA will publish the approved Peer [Training Providers](#) on this website: <http://www.capeercertification.org/>

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7. *If a peer has recently completed peer training (e.g., within the last 6 months) from one of the approved peer training providers (e.g., RI International) would CalMHSA require the peer to re-take the training? Or is CalMHSA going to allow the peers to just take the test to be certified?*

BHS: CalMHSA confirmed that a peer that is interested in taking the Peer Support Specialist certification examination via the [legacy/grandparenting](#) path and has completed a peer training (e.g., RI International training), but has not completed the [legacy requirements](#) will have to **apply via the Initial Certification path**. This entails completing an 80-hour training with an approved [Training Provider](#) prior to taking the certification examination.

8. *If a peer completes the 80 hours of training through one of the approved vendors but decides not to take the certification test right away, is there a time limit to how long that peer training completion would be good for to be eligible to test for certification?*

BHS: CalMHSA confirmed that peers have 12 months from the date their applications to complete their certification, including passing the exam. The training is valid through the end of that 12-month period.

9. *We've received feedback that certification takes up to 15 months including one year of work experience. Is this correct? If so, it would limit workforce availability for existing positions and result in more program vacancies.*

BHS: There are 2 pathways for peer certification: legacy and initial. Only the legacy process requires prior work experience. The [Initial Certification](#) process entails completing an 80-hour training with an approved [Training Provider](#) prior to taking the certification examination and does not include any prior work experience.

10. *It is taking up to 60 days to get an exam scheduled. Could exam dates be more frequently available?*

BHS: Per CalMHSA, they are working with third party exam administrator PearsonVUE to address the demand for availability of exam dates in the San Diego area. They will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates as they become available. As a reminder, certification applicants may take online tests.

E. **BHS Providers**

1. *What can providers expect for the changes in the pay model if providers are working to increase the demands of this role forward?*

BHS: BHS builds competitive wages into procurement funding however actual payment for staffing positions is left to agencies to develop.

2. *Are the certification trainings offered at the county's expense or do agencies pay for staff to attend?*

BHS: Providers may leverage their contract training budgets and consider any scholarship or paid training opportunities that may be offered in the community.

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3. *What are some of the options available to BHS Providers for assisting Peer Support Specialists in obtaining jobs within the BHS provider network?*

BHS: Individuals and program providers may directly contact various [BHS programs](#) for information on job opportunities.

4. *In addition to peer training provided through CalMHSA, what resources are available to BHS Providers to support Peer Support Specialists?*

BHS: Providers are encouraged to avail of resources that their organization deems appropriate. Some resources found online for BHS Providers to support Peer Support Specialists could include, but are not limited to:

- Doors to Wellbeing [National Consumer Technical Assistance Center](#)
- Recovery Innovations-International (RI-I) [Hope Central](#)
- [C4Innovations](#)
- National Association of Peer Supporters [N.A.P.S.](#)
- CA Association of Mental Health Peer Run Organizations [CAMHPRO](#)
- WRAP Certification Training [Copeland Center](#) Correspondence Course
- WHAM Facilitator and Participant Manuals [Center on Integrated Health Care & Self-Directed Recovery](#)

5. *Until further information is available from CalMHSA on Peer Supervisor training, what resources are available to BHS Providers to support Supervisors of Peer Support Specialists?*

BHS: The “Supervision of Peer Workers” training course offered by CalMHSA is now available. The training is free-of-charge, self-paced, and is approximately one hour. To register for the training follow the instructions found [here](#).

6. *A Family Support Partner is currently working with a family, is scheduled to start the 80-hour training in September 2023, and therefore won't be certified until roughly October 2023 if they pass the exam. Can they continue to work with the families already on their caseloads? Can they bill the other non-peer codes that other MHRS would bill, until they become certified peers and therefore need a new ARF to change their billing access?*

BHS: While our local emphasis on certification is leading us in the best practice direction that positions that have been identified as requiring behavioral health lived experience must be filled with Certified Peer Support Specialists who are trained and certified per the process defined on the [CalMHSA website](#), it is important to support individuals in being able to work as soon as possible. DHCS requires Peers to be Certified prior to billing the Peer Specific service codes, but there are some non-Peer specific specialty mental health service codes that can potentially be used prior to certification. Although we are locally emphasizing the best practice approach that required peer positions are filled with Certified Peer Specialists, or certification is obtained within 90 days of hire, there is flexibility for supporting programs and individuals who cannot meet the requirements and timelines. Programs may work with the peer staff to determine if ‘Other Qualified Provider’ criteria is met so specialty mental health services can be delivered with the use of appropriate billing codes in the interim. For SMHS providers, OPOH Section M provides requirements for the Other Qualified Provider (aka ParaProfessional) credential and scope of practice.

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Please note that individuals with lived experience hired in SMHS positions that have not been identified as requiring behavioral health lived experience do not require certification and are able to provide direct services to clients within their appropriate scope of practice as an MHRS or Other Qualified Practitioner upon hire.

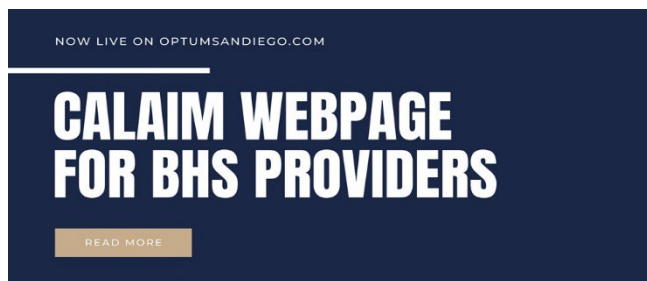
As a reminder, programs may hire individuals working toward peer certification within 90 days of hire and during this time, programs should ensure that all onboarding trainings and certification requirements are being completed/met. COR approval is needed for situations that the timeline cannot be met by a peer. For the list of required trainings, refer to: [San Diego Certified Peer Support Specialists – TRAINING REQUIREMENTS](#). BHS Programs are advised to review specific contract requirements with their COR to identify those positions which require behavioral health lived experience and those that do not hold this requirement.

7. A SMHS program has hired a lot of new peers and wants to stagger their peer trainings to avoid lapse in services. We know it's documented that they can't bill in CCBH without being certified, because they can only bill Peer codes, and they aren't Peers until certified. Where can we find anything specific to this?

BHS: While our local emphasis on certification is leading us in the best practice direction that positions that have been identified as requiring behavioral health lived experience must be filled with Certified Peer Support Specialists who are trained and certified per the process defined on the [CalMHSA website](#), it is important to support individuals in being able to work as soon as possible. DHCS requires Peers to be Certified prior to billing the Peer Specific service codes, but there are some non-Peer specific specialty mental health service codes that can potentially be used prior to certification. Although we are locally emphasizing the best practice approach that required peer positions are filled with Certified Peer Specialists, or certification is obtained within 90 days of hire, there is flexibility for supporting programs and individuals who cannot meet the requirements and timelines. Programs may work with the peer staff to determine if 'Other Qualified Provider' criteria is met so specialty mental health services can be delivered with the use of appropriate billing codes in the interim. For SMHS providers, OPOH Section M provides requirements for the Other Qualified Provider (aka ParaProfessional) credential and scope of practice.

F. Miscellaneous

1. Please [click here](#) for a copy of the Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist presentation dated March 2022.
2. San Diego's Peer Council meets the 3rd Tuesday of each month at 2pm. For additional information, click on the Council link on [Advocacy – NAMI San Diego](#).



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