

PEER SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION

ALASKA COMMISSION ON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
CERTIFICATION

HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CERTIFICATION

- In Alaska, the work of the Alaska Peer Support Consortium and others, influenced Peer Support being incorporated into the State's Medicaid Plan in 2011.
- The Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) encouraged states to develop education and training requirements or certifications for peer support providers.
- Peer support providers working in the field advocated for certification in order to acknowledge their skills and abilities;
- Agencies wanted to see a Certification in order to provide some assurance of the competencies of their existing peer support staff and potential new hires.

HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CERTIFICATION

- More recently, the Division of Behavioral Health promoted the importance of a Certification as it began to develop the 1115 Medicaid Waiver.
- Late in 2017, a gathering of over a 100-person “Peer Support Stakeholder Group”, comprising MH peers, SUD peers, agency directors, MH Trust and State leadership, was held. Focus was the development of the peer support workforce.
- This led to the creation of multiple workgroups including one specifically on Peer Support Certification. Over the next 9 months, this workgroup created a list of core recommendations for the Certification.

HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CERTIFICATION

In FY 2020, the Division contracted with the Alaska Commission for Behavioral Health Certification (ACBHC) to develop the Certification.

Key to this was the creation of an Advisory Board for the Commission to be comprised of a majority of peers. The information presented here, as well as the variety of matrices and applications created, reflect a summary of the Advisory Board's work over the last 6 months.

HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CERTIFICATION

- For Alaska, we have attempted to keep the barriers to entry minimal while creating a multi-level matrix of certification that reflects some of the framework for ACBHC's other certification programs.

ACBHC Commissioner and Staff involved with Peer Support

- Jerry Jenkins, MEd, LADC, ACBHC Commissioner
- Dabney Van Liere, ACBHC Executive Director
- Marlene Johnson, Program Coordinator

ACBHC ADVISORY BOARD

- Katherine Andrews - Program Coordinator, Alaska Mental Health Consumer Web
- Jay Bechtol - CEO, South Peninsula Behavioral Health Services
- Dave Branding - CEO, JAMHI Health and Wellness, Inc.
- Lee "St'aas't" Breinig - Behavioral Health & Wellness Advocate
- Robert Dorton - SUD Peer Support Worker
- Jenifer Galvan - Peer Support Program Manager, Alaska Behavioral Health
- Shannon Harris - Peer Support Program Manager, Set Free Alaska
- Jim McLaughlin - Mental Health Clinician III, Division of Behavioral Health

ACBHC DEFINITION OF A PEER SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL

- A Peer Support Professional is an individual with the lived experience of recovery from either a mental health condition, from a substance use disorder, or from caring for a family member with such a condition. Peer Support Professionals deliver behavioral health-oriented support services to individuals with experiences similar to their own; within an organization and under supervision. The Peer Support Professional offers assistance and support to promote another peer's own personal recovery journey. Peer Support Professionals are expected to share portions of their own recovery experience in an appropriate and effective manner.

CERTIFICATION SUMMARY

Behavioral Health Peer Support

- The focus of the certification is on peers with lived experience with behavioral health issues. There have been previous discussions about whether the Certification could apply to other populations but the consensus was this should be behavioral health (MH, SUD) focused.

Competencies

- The SAMHSA Core Competencies for Peer Support Workers in Behavioral Health were used as the foundation for this process. These competencies were developed in 2015 by a national group of subject matter experts in Peer Support and apply equally to both peers with a substance use and peers with a mental health focus.
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A GENERAL CERTIFICATION

- This is a single, general BH peer certification as opposed to being broken into a variety of different certifications or sub-specialties.
- This Certification can be utilized by peers with lived experience with a substance use challenge, or a mental health challenge or their family members. It can be used by BH peers with a re-entry focus, by youth peers who have lived experience with BH issues, or other sub-specialties.
- The competencies and required training address basic knowledge and skills common to all peer support providers. It's expected that peers will seek out additional training in their area of specialty.

TRADITIONAL PEER SUPPORT

- However, the Advisory Board discussed the unique importance of Peer Support that is geared specifically to the Alaska Native population and chose to identify a separate designation for Traditional Peer Support with largely the same requirements as Peer Support Professionals.
- The Board felt there was a need to highlight that this certification was relevant for Alaska Natives in recovery from behavioral health issues who provide support primarily to other Alaska Natives utilizing traditional cultural interactions.

LEVELS OF CERTIFICATION

- The original Stakeholder Group had recommended utilizing multiple Certification levels to acknowledge the various levels of training, experience, and competencies that peer support providers have and to create a “career ladder” for these providers. The Advisory Board ultimately defined four levels:



LEVELS OF CERTIFICATION

- **Peer Support Associate and Traditional Peer Support Associate** (entry level with minimal barriers)
- **Peer Support Professional I and Traditional Peer Support Professional I**
- **Peer Support Professional II and Traditional Peer Support Professional II** (additional training/experience)
- **Peer Support III and Traditional Peer Support Professional III** (training to provide mentorship to other peer support workers)

AGE REQUIREMENT

- Although many states have a minimum age of 18 for peer support certification, there is increasing growth in the country with Youth and Young Adult Peer Support. Many agencies have 18 as a minimum age requirement for staff but some youth-serving agencies have employed younger staff in a peer support role. This Certification will not have a minimum age requirement, leaving this issue to agencies to set their own policies.

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

- We are aware that there are many individuals capable of being excellent peer support providers that have not completed High School or a GED. Still, peer support documentation requirements will require a certain level of proficiency in reading and writing.
- The entry level Peer Support Associate level will not have a minimum education requirement.
- Peer Support I, II, and III will have a requirement for a High School Diploma or GED.
- Recognizing unique economic and educational challenges in rural villages in Alaska, Traditional Peer Support Professionals applicants can request a waiver of the H.S Diploma/GED requirement.



LIVED EXPERIENCE AND RECOVERY

- The application requires that individuals document a self-attestation to their “lived experience” and recovery. Additionally, individuals will be asked to describe their experience with recovery and the skills they utilize to maintain it. Applications for all levels require at least one letter of reference.



TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Introductory 40-hour course

- The 40-hour initial training is based on the SAMHSA Peer Support Competencies. These were recommended as the basis for the training by the initial stakeholder group in 2017. These Competencies were converted into the “Requirements for the Alaska Peer Support Specialist Training Curriculum” by the Division of Behavioral Health.
- This training is a requirement for all levels of certification (except for certain levels in the grandfathering or “grandparenting” application for those already working in the field).

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Introductory 40-hour course

- Potential trainers for the 40-hour Introductory Training have been and continue to be invited to submit their curricula to DBH. Curricula are reviewed and then officially approved by DBH in order to provide the 40-hour course. A training entity can submit their curriculum for review to DBH at any time. Currently 5 trainers are approved.
- These trainings are currently being conducted. DBH has funding to contract for this training to be offered numerous times over the next 2 years and will provide a distance-delivery version of it for outlying areas.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Additional Required Training Prior to Certification

- All levels of certification require courses in Ethics, Confidentiality, and Infectious Diseases and HIV/AIDS prior to Certification and require repeat training every 2 years in Ethics and Confidentiality. Recertification every 2 years will also require additional CEUs.

Continuing Education

- Recertification and advancement to higher certification levels will require a specific number of training hours from a “menu” of eligible training topics. Training in each and every topic listed on the “menu” is not required. The Advisory Board recommended a menu of trainings, rather than a shorter list of required trainings for two specific reasons:

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Continuing Education

- All the topics on the menu relate to the list of required competencies and all are of arguably equal importance. Singling out some and not others would be arbitrary.
- Although all topics are addressed in the 40-hour Introductory Training, the very large number of them (14) would make a requirement for specific training in all of them excessive.

REQUIRED
WORK
EXPERIENCE
(PAID OR
VOLUNTEER)

A defined number of hours of work experience is required for each level.

Peer Support Associate - no prior hours of work experience is required for this entry level.

Peer Support Professional I level - 1000 hours are required (6 months if full time, 1 year at half-time)

Peer Support Professional II - 4000 hours are required (2 years if full time)

Peer Support Professional III - 6000 hours are required (3 years if full time)



SUPERVISION HOURS

- **Peer Support Associate** - No previous supervision hours are required for the entry-level Peer Support Associate, although individuals must work under supervision once hired.
- **Peer Support Profession Level I** - requires 25 hours of direct supervision to be certified at this level.
- **Peer Support Professional Level II** – requires 100 hours of direct supervision to be certified at this level.
- **Peer Support Professional Level III** – requires 150 hours of direct supervision to be certified at this level.

SUPERVISION HOURS

- Supervision for Peer Support Professionals can be provided by any individual who is in a designated role as a supervisor within an organization providing supports to individuals with behavioral health issues.
- Supervisor training in Peer Support is highly encouraged but not required given the current limited access to this training.

ELIGIBLE WORK SITES

- The Advisory Board acknowledged that in addition to Community Behavioral Health Treatment agencies, there are also recovery-based, non-treatment agencies that would be appropriate training and work sites for peer support providers.
- Any organization that provides behavioral health supports (even if not a traditional treatment agency) would be an eligible work site if supervision were provided.

CODE OF ETHICS

- Based on the Advisory Board recommendation, the ACBHC adopted a Peer Support Code of Ethics for the Certification which combined elements of an earlier version developed by the Alaska Peer Support Consortium and elements of the NAADAC National Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist Code of Ethics.

NO EXAM

- There is no exam for certification – simply satisfaction of the requirements for work hours, hours of supervision (if required), and training.

“GRANDPARENTING” AND RECIPROCITY

- Recognizing the importance of providing special access to certification for individuals who have already been working in the field as peer support workers, there is a special grandfathering or “grandparenting” matrix and application.
- Similarly, there is a recommended reciprocity application for individuals certified in another state who want to become certified in Alaska.

BACKGROUND DISCLOSURE

- The Peer Support Certification will use the same application questions on background disclosure as other ACBHC Certifications use (i.e. CDC). Individuals answering 'yes' to any question will be required to write a letter to the Commission explaining the circumstances and reasons why it would not reoccur. Individuals with a Barrier Crime will need to go through the DHSS Background Check Unit Variance process unless they have already secured a Variance.

AVAILABILITY OF APPLICATIONS

- Applications will be available on the Alaska Commission for Behavioral Health Certification website located at: <https://akcertification.org>. We fully anticipate the Peer Support Professional Certification page will be up and running by early to mid-January and applications can be filled out and completed at that point.

WEBINAR ON PEER SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

Peer Support Professional Certification Program in Alaska

Monday, December 14 1:00 - 2:30

For more information and to register

www.aktclms.org/Training/Class/103949

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PEER SUPPORT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Upcoming Trainings in FY21 and FY22
- University of Alaska
- Apprenticeships

QUESTIONS?

- Please submit questions by writing them in the Chat section.