



Build Your Peer Career: National Advanced Certification

Patrick Hendry

MIHA
Mental Health America
B4Stage4

“Recovery is no longer only about what clinicians do to consumers. It has become, with the assistance of CPSs’, what peers do for themselves and each other.”

Georgia CPS Project website

The key to the success of using Peer Specialists as part of the mental health system of care is their understanding of what creates recovery and how to build a system conducive to its’ success.



For many years peer support has been seen primarily as a job with very little room for career advancement or significant pay increases.

For those of us who have worked in community mental health, income levels were generally stagnant, and consequently we have lost many excellent peer support workers.

But Something Has Changed!



With decades of experience and rapidly growing evidence behavioral health and healthcare in general is catching on that **this stuff actually works.**

Peer support enhances recovery, it improves the overall quality of our lives. It assists people in maintaining or regaining control of their treatment and their lives.

It is effective at all stages of recovery and it has the power to transform communities and services.

The Advantages of Peer Support

It is especially appealing to the funders of mental health services because it is extremely cost effective.

In a 10 month pilot program for a large health care provider and funder 2 full time MHA peer specialists produced hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings through reduced rehospitalizations and ER visits.

Cost effective means that more people will have access to services



Peer Support is Growing Rapidly!

- ❑ In the past **17 years** the number of certified peer specialists **has grown exponentially**.
- ❑ In 2001, Georgia graduated the first class of Certified Peer Specialists in the nation. **35 individuals received certification**
- ❑ In **2014** it was reported that there were **14,000 certified peer specialists**.
- ❑ In **2016** the number went to **24,000**
- ❑ It is **now estimated** to be over **30,000**. That doesn't include states, without certification, like California where there are an estimated **6,000** peers working to provide support, and there are 4 other states without certification that provide employment for peer supporters.

There may be **well over 40,000 peer specialists**
in the U.S.

The Problem is....

- Every state that has developed a certification for peer support has its' own standards.
- These standards can vary significantly from state to state.
- In order for peer support to move beyond funding through Medicaid or state tax revenues we must involve Medicare and private health insurance.
- Because these systems work across state lines they want a set of standards that apply across the nation.
- They also want peer support workers with advanced skills and a high degree of experience that are able to work alongside clinicians without becoming a clinical service.



Emerging Opportunities

- Health insurance plans and large healthcare organizations are interested in providing peer support as an element of their array of services.
- The opportunities for more jobs and career paths, plus higher wages is exciting.

But how do we overcome the problems of varying standards and levels of experience?

A Necessary Step for Expanding Peer Support

In answer to these problems Mental Health America has developed the first **advanced level national peer support credential**, the **MHA National Certified Peer Specialist**.

- Our certification requires:
 - Applicants to have a minimum of 3000 hours of peer support experience.
 - Advanced knowledge and skill sets that are measured by a rigorous 125 question proctored exam.
 - State certification for individuals working in states that have an established credential.
 - For individuals working in states without certification we require training through a MHA approved training organization.
 - Applicants who have had the minimum of 40 hours of training may need to take supplemental courses in order to pass the examination.

A Necessary Step for Expanding Peer Support

- Advanced level national certification **is** the answer to the needs of private payers and Medicare.
- Mental Health America and its affiliates have already piloted providing peer support services for the largest HMO and the largest hospital organization in the country.
- We are now in the process of implementing new pilots with private health insurance and one of the nations largest healthcare organizations.

Becoming a MHA National Certified Peer Specialist can open new doors to better jobs and career paths!

How do I become a MHA NCPS?

The NCPS requirements are:

- A high school diploma or GED
- 3000 hours of supervised experience in providing peer support
- Current state certification OR completion of a MHA approved training program
- 1 Professional letter of recommendation for certification
- 1 Supervisory letter of recommendation for certification
- Attest to lived experience

How do I become a MHA NCPS?

The NCPS requirements are:

- Agree to be bound by the MHA NCPS code of ethics
- Pass the MHA NCPS written examination
- Submit all required certification forms and fees
- The cost of certification is \$225 for 2 years
- The cost of the written examination is \$200
- The cost of renewal is \$200 every 2 years

Applications for the NCPS credential are available at www.NationalPeerSpecialist.org

What will it take to meet the need?

- There are approximately **11 million individuals** with serious mental health problems in the country, and many **millions more** experiencing health conditions that would benefit from the availability of peer support.
- To underscore just how serious the situation is, a significant number of the 40,000 existing peer specialists are currently unemployed.

What will it take to meet the need?

In the next five to ten years it is estimated that the certified peer workforce will account for as much as 20-25% of the behavioral health workforce. Manderscheid, R. Ph.D. NACBHDD/NARMH

Not including school behavioral health or marriage and family therapists, 20-25% would require an employed workforce of approximately 84,000-105,000 certified peer specialists.



What will it take to meet the need?

- In order to meet this growing need for peer support we must be able to meet the needs of the funding organizations.

That is why an advanced national certification like the MHA NCPS is so important.

It will allow expansion
of peer support
across healthcare

What will it take to meet the need?

Recently on a single national job search website there were over 700 peer support positions listed.

As more and more peers find work in peer support they are beginning to think of ways to build career paths with the possibility of advancement.



Career Paths in Peer Support

Today's environment in behavioral health offers many opportunities for peer support to become a major aspect of our healthcare services.

It is important that our support organizations grow organically through mastering each component prior to major expansion.

The Expanding Role of Peer Support

As peer support knowledge increases so do the possibilities for its use. There are already organizations using peers in multiple specialties.

- Outpatient peer support
- Mobil crisis teams/crisis intervention
- ERs and crisis units
- Inpatient services
- The “Bridger” model
- Justice system involved peer support
- Substance use and addictions
- Respite
- Homeless outreach
- Youth peer support
- Maternal MH peer support
- Peer support training

The Expanding Role of Peer Support

Along with these expanded roles, organizations that provide peer support services are beginning to create career paths for individuals that may have returned to work as peer supporters.

A number of peer run organizations have created or adopted a business model that allows them to employ peers and contract out their services to providers and funders.



The Expanding Role of Peer Support

As these organization grow, refine the scope of their services and expand into the private sector it becomes necessary to grow the infrastructure to support them.

Not only would this include administrative infrastructure but also full programmatic management including:

Departmental management

New program development

Project managers

Supervisors

Multiple levels of peer support workers

Training

What other positions might they need?

The Expanding Role of Peer Support

As individuals expand their career skills they open up new possibilities for advancement in management:

- Contract management
- Development & fundraising
- Human resources
- Communications and media
- Financial services
- Agency management



What other positions might they fill?

The Expanding Role of Peer Support

Many peers bring critical skills with them when they first begin working in peer support. Peer support workers have often held significant positions in other industries prior to entering the peer workforce.

As we look around at many of the most successful organizations providing peer support services we find an incredible diversity of skills and expertise.



The Expanding Role of Peer Support

There are many opportunities for career education through experience, the internet, and in most local communities.

Certification generally has an ongoing education requirement in order to maintain your credentials. Local community colleges and other institutions frequently have classes in the various aspects of business management.

Professional organizations often provide free webinars that provide additional training.



Career Paths in Peer Support

A 2012 Deloitte survey, Talent 2020, found that when employees were asked to indicate the major factors that might cause them to look for new employment over the next 12 months, **lack of career progress topped the list**, suggesting the need for career development plans for staff. According to these survey results, pay is significant; however, the importance of promotion and job advancement is underestimated by executives.

Career Paths in Peer Support

There are growing numbers of organizations that are actively providing career development plans for their peer support employees.

Experts say that **employees who believe their employers make effective use of their talents and abilities are overwhelmingly more committed to staying on the job.**



Ask Yourself these Questions

- What would a career in peer support look like?
- What would career advancement look like?
- How would the skills of peer support assist you in building your career?
- What would it take financially for you to feel like the value of your work is being acknowledged?
- How do you see your career developing in the future?



And, Finally

How do we grow healthy organizations, both peer-run and not, that will support individuals who wish to build careers in peer support?



**Leading Organizations
to Health**

Become a MHA National Certified Peer Specialist Today



www.nationalpeerspecialist.org

Contact Us



📍 Mental Health America
500 Montgomery Street
Suite 820
Alexandria, VA 22314

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🐦 [Twitter.com/mentalhealtham](https://twitter.com/mentalhealtham)

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💬 Patrick Hendry
Vice President, Peer Advocacy,
Supports & Services
phendry@mentalhealthamerica.net



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