

Certifying Peer Support Specialists for Medi-Cal Reimbursement



In 2020, California passed a law (Senate Bill 803) that makes it possible for county mental health plans and substance use disorder plans (behavioral health plans) to receive Medi-Cal reimbursement for services provided by Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists. This important step in the delivery of behavioral health care values the experience that peers — persons with lived experience — can provide and expands counties' capacity to care for those who need them.

While peers have and will continue to lend their expertise in a variety of ways to support county behavioral health plans, Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists are recognized as a new provider type, adhering to a professional code of ethics, requiring specific training and certification.

HOW is the program administered?

The California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), which oversees the administration of Medi-Cal programs, establishes the standards for certification to align with SB 803. The County Behavioral Health Plans implement peer certification programs and deliver peer support services based on DHCS Behavioral Health Information Notices.

WHY is CalMHSA the certifying entity?

County Behavioral Health Plans selected CalMHSA to implement a single, standardized Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist certification program. This was done in recognition of the need for a uniform process across the state — one that does not require peers to obtain multiple certifications in multiple counties, supports quality and application of standards, creates efficiency for counties, and adds credibility to the peer profession in California.

WHAT is CalMHSA doing to advance the certification program?

CalMHSA began its work as the certifying entity in May 2021. Through spring of 2025, CalMHSA certified more than 5,750 Peers statewide (among whom 68% received a DHCS-funded scholarship), approved a total of 50 training providers and extended the program to 54 California counties.

- A **dedicated website** with comprehensive information on certification
- Offer the **exam in 10 languages** to broaden the process, include more peers, and assist more Californians on a path to recovery



- Added a new training provider who trained more than 400 **justice-involved individuals** at nine state correctional facilities — offering hope for employment upon reentry and further building the mental health workforce.
- A **powerful new dashboard** that includes aggregated data about certified professionals such as race, ethnicity, gender, experience and more
- A **Best Practice Guide for Employing Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists** that helps employers understand the value of Peers
- An **online job board** where counties can post open positions for certified Peers
- A **no-cost training** for Peer supervision that meets the training requirement for prospective supervisors
- A **program analysis by the RAND Corp.** that describes how certification and Medi-Cal reimbursement have affected the integration of Peers into behavioral health care

WHO else is involved in the development process?

CalMHSA works with its **Stakeholder Advisory Council** and county behavioral health plans to ensure the voice of peers is reflected in the certification program and receives technical assistance from DHCS.

WHERE can individuals find out more about training?

For details on training, certification, examination, applying and more, visit **capeercertification.org**.