



# Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist – Scholarships

## INTRODUCTION

The California Department of Healthcare Services (DHCS) is invested in supporting workforce and development in the public behavioral health system. DHCS is the state agency in charge of administering the state's Medicaid (Medi-Cal) programs. Aligned with Senate Bill 803, which adds a certified peer support specialist as a new Medi-Cal provider type and peer services as reimbursable via Medi-Cal. DHCS has set standards for minimum requirements for certification of Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists in California.

DHCS has identified the California Mental Health Services Authority, (CaIMHSA), as the state's certifying entity for the certification of Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists. The role of CaIMHSA as the certifying entity is to issuance of certifications for Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists and to ensure all policies and procedures guiding the certification program are upheld and applied uniformly, including standards for training and exam.

CaIMHSA's role includes:

- Administration of scholarships
- Issue certifications for Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists
- Ensure all requirements are met by an individual prior to receiving a certification for Peer Support Specialist.
- Develop, administer, and score the exam for certification.

## SCHOLARSHIP BACKGROUND

DHCS has made limited funding available in the form of scholarships for Peers seeking to Certification for Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists in California. A peer is defined as a person having experience with the process of recovery from mental illness or substance abuse disorder, either as a consumer of these services or as the parent, caregiver, or family member of a consumer. **The scholarships and funding are time limited.** A total of 5,000 scholarships are available: 2,500 for peers under the grandparenting process and 2,500 for "initial" peers, not under the grandparenting process.

The peer support benefit is considered an optional benefit for counties. This means that a county may elect to establish this benefit. The scholarships are available only to counties who have elected to implement the peer support benefit. Participating counties will identify individuals for scholarships within



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their respected county who are currently employed or working within their Mental Health or Behavioral Health plans, including their contract provider network. Individuals seeking certification under the out-of-state reciprocity process are not eligible for participation in the scholarship program.

## **Scholarship applications are open as follows:**

- May 2, 2022 – July 31, 2022
  - For applicants seeking certification under the **grandparenting** process, applicants must be employed as a Peer as of January 1, 2022, and shall meet the work experience, training requirements, and all other requirements under the grandparenting process.
  - Scholarship under the grandparenting process covers application and exam costs.
- July 1, 2022 – September 30, 2022
  - For applicants seeking initial certification, not under the grandparenting process, applicants shall meet training and all other requirements.
  - Scholarship covers application, training, and exam costs.
- Scholarship applications are open as noted above or until scholarships have been depleted, whichever comes first. A total of 5,000 scholarships will be distributed: 2,500 for peers under the grandparenting process and 2,500 for peers seeking “initial” certification, not through the grandparenting process.
- Scholarships shall expire on November 30, 2022<sup>1</sup>. This means an individual must be registered for the certification exam prior to November 30, 2022, or the scholarship will be forfeited and considered expired/invalid.
- No extensions will be granted for expiration of scholarships.

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<sup>1</sup> Dates are based on the availability of the exam being published and are subject to change.



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## SCHOLARSHIP PROCESS

### County Process

Recognizing the diversity in county populations, information about scholarship availability shall be disseminated by each county. Each county will provide information on the process for selection and/or requests for consideration for the scholarship. Each participating county will be informed of the number of available scholarships for their county for either, mental health or substance use disorder plans or both, dependent on county's election of implementation of the peer support benefit. Each county shall identify a liaison to coordinate with CaIMHSA on the scholarship distribution. The liaison will provide the names of applicants for scholarships.

### Certifying Entity

CaIMHSA, will administer the distribution of scholarships in coordination with counties who have elected to implement the peer support benefit. **The scholarships and funding are time limited.** The DHCS has identified a specified number of scholarships that each of the counties will receive. The number of scholarships each county receives is based on the overall percentage of persons eligible for Medi-Cal in the respected county. In the case where more scholarship applicants than scholarships are available for any given county, the applicant who has met minimum requirements shall be placed on a waitlist. CaIMHSA has reserved 30 scholarships in the event of unforeseen situations.

- All scholarship applications will be reviewed by the certifying entity.
- Only completed applications will be reviewed.
- Applicant will be notified of status of their application within 30 calendar days from date the application was submitted. All notifications to the application shall be made through electronic communication (email) using the email address on file.
- Waitlist: When scholarships are no longer available for a given county, the applicant will be placed on a waitlist.
- Scholarships shall expire on November 30, 2022. Persons awarded a scholarship shall have registered for the exam by November 30, 2022, otherwise the scholarship is forfeited and invalid.
- Scholarships will be awarded directly to the applicant. Information shall be sent though the email on file.



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- The scholarship shall contain a unique identification number. The scholarship is not transferrable.
- Unused or expired scholarships will be returned to a “general inventory pool” for redistribution to applicants on the waitlist.

## **All applicants are required to meet the following requirements for consideration for scholarship:**

- Must be at least 18 years of age. Proof of age is required (state or government-issued photo identification, such as driver’s license, identification card, and passport).
- Possess a high school diploma, general equivalency degree (GED) or college degree. Submission of diploma or transcripts are required.
- Self-identify 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.
- Be willing to share one’s experience as a person with lived experience and recovery to help others.
- Have a strong dedication to recovery.
- Agree, in writing, to the Medi-Cal Code of Ethics
- Watch the Orientation and Self-Assessment video prior to submitting application (approximately 30-minutes in length).
- Submit a complete application within the open scholarship application timeframe, as noted above.
- Response to narrative question scholarship will be evaluated.
- Pass the state exam.

The following are the priority criteria for awarding of scholarships that fall into the “general inventory pool”. This means any unused or expired scholarships will go into a “general inventory pool” for distribution:

- Order in which the applicant was waitlisted.
- Response to narrative question on the scholarship application.
- Applicants who are from underrepresented racial, ethnic, cultural, and other diverse backgrounds.



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## Steps

1. Applicant are required to apply through the CaIMHSA Certification website following the recommended by the county for a scholarship.
2. Applicant is required to watch the orientation video for Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists in California.
3. Applicant shall complete the scholarship application. The scholarship application consists of 1 question requiring a brief narrative response.
4. Awardee of scholarship that includes training costs:
  - a. Awardee shall select where to receive training from the list of approved training entities. An Awardee shall adhere to registration information as required by the approved training entity. Awardee shall present the scholarship to the approved training entity at the time of registration for training.
5. All Awardee shall register for the exam prior to November 30, 2022, or scholarship shall be forfeited and invalid. Unused or expired scholarships will be returned to a “general inventory pool” (not county specific) and will be distributed to peers on waitlist.
6. Awardee shall successfully pass the state-approved exam to receive certification for Peer Support Specialist.



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## FAQs for Scholarship Application Process

### **1. Who is making scholarships available?**

- The Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) has made limited funding available in the form of scholarships for Peers seeking Certification for Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists in California. *The scholarships and funding are time limited.*

### **2. What does the scholarship cover?**

- For individuals seeking initial certification, the scholarship covers costs for application, training, and exam.
- For individuals seeking certification through the grandparenting process, the scholarship covers costs for application and examination.

### **3. When will scholarships become available?**

Scholarship applications are open as follows:

- May 2, 2022 – July 31, 2022  
For applicants seeking certification under the grandparenting process, applicants must be employed as a Peer as of January 1, 2022, and shall meet the work experience, training requirements, and all other requirements under the grandparenting process.
- July 1, 2022 – September 30, 2022  
For applicants seeking initial certification, not under the grandparenting process, applicants shall meet training and all other requirements.

Scholarship applications are open as noted above or until scholarships have been depleted, whichever comes first. A total of 5,000 scholarships will be distributed: 2,500 for peers under the grandparenting process and 2,500 for “initial” peers, not under the grandparenting process.



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## **4. How long will scholarships be valid for?**

- Scholarships will expire on November 30, 2022. Awardee must be registered for the examination prior to November 30, 2022. All forfeited or expired scholarships will be returned to a “general pool inventory” and awarded to applicants on the waitlist.
- No extensions will be granted for expired scholarships.

## **5. Who may apply for a scholarship?**

- Peers interested in providing peer support services in a Medi-Cal program. Peer refers to a person having experience with the process of recovery from mental illness or substance abuse disorder, either as a consumer of these services or as the parent, caregiver, or family member of a consumer.

## **6. How do I apply for a scholarship?**

- Participating counties will disseminate information on how to apply.
- Participating counties will identify individuals for scholarships within their respected county who are currently employed or volunteering within their Mental Health or Behavioral Health plans, including their contract provider network.

## **7. How are you addressing equity in the application process?**

- With equity in mind, DHCS assigned a set number of scholarships for each of the participating counties. The number of persons eligible for Medi-Cal in each county was the basis for identifying the number of scholarships assigned.
- Priority criteria for applicants on the waitlist have been established for the distribution of scholarships. Applicants from underrepresented people from racial, ethnic, cultural, and other diverse backgrounds will be taken into consideration in the scholarship selection process.

## **8. Will all counties receive an allotment of scholarships?**

- No. The scholarships are available only to counties who have elected to implement the peer support benefit.



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## 9. Where can I find information on participating counties?

- The following counties are being represented by CaIMHSA for the administration of their certification program. The following counties will be allotted scholarships.

|    |              |    |                 |
|----|--------------|----|-----------------|
| 1  | Alameda      | 27 | Placer          |
| 2  | Amador       | 28 | Plumas          |
| 3  | Butte        | 29 | Riverside       |
| 4  | Calaveras    | 30 | Sacramento      |
| 5  | Colusa       | 31 | San Bernardino  |
| 6  | Contra Costa | 32 | San Diego       |
| 7  | Del Norte    | 33 | San Francisco   |
| 8  | El Dorado    | 34 | San Joaquin     |
| 9  | Fresno       | 35 | San Luis Obispo |
| 10 | Glenn        | 36 | San Mateo       |
| 11 | Humboldt     | 37 | Santa Barbara   |
| 12 | Inyo         | 38 | Santa Clara     |
| 13 | Kerns        | 39 | Santa Cruz      |
| 14 | Kings        | 40 | Shasta          |
| 15 | Lake         | 41 | Sierra          |
| 16 | Lassen       | 42 | Siskiyou        |
| 16 | Los Angeles  | 43 | Solano          |
| 18 | Madera       | 44 | Sonoma          |
| 19 | Marin        | 45 | Stanislaus      |
| 20 | Mendocino    | 46 | Sutter-Yuba     |
| 21 | Merced       | 47 | Tehama          |
| 22 | Modoc        | 48 | Trinity         |
| 23 | Mono         | 49 | Tulare          |
| 24 | Monterey     | 50 | Tuolumne        |
| 25 | Nevada       | 51 | Ventura         |
| 26 | Orange       | 52 | Yolo            |

## 10. How will CaIMHSA distribute scholarships?

- Certifying entity will review all applications.
- Only completed applications will be reviewed.
- Scholarship will be awarded directly to the applicant.
- Information will be provided through email.

## 11. When will I hear back about my scholarship application?

- Applicants shall receive notification by the certifying entity within 30 days from date of application.





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**12.If I am not chosen for a scholarship, will I be put on a waitlist?**

- Yes, your name will be added to a waitlist. Scholarships will be awarded to those on the waitlist in order of application. You will be notified by email if you are chosen for a waitlisted scholarship.

**13.Will Peers get to choose which training programs they attend?**

- Yes. Scholarships will be awarded directly to the peer. Peers will choose where they will receive training from a list of “approved training programs” located on the CaIMHSA Certification website.

**14.How many times can I take the exam using the scholarship?**

- The scholarship covers one-time cost for the exam.

**15.Will there be a waitlist for scholarships if my county of employment runs out?**

- When scholarships are no longer available for a given county, the peer will be placed on a waitlist. Unused or expired scholarships will be returned to a general inventory pool (not county specific) and will be distributed to peers on waitlist.

**16. How will persons on the waitlist be prioritized?**

- Order in which applicant was waitlisted.
- Response to narrative question on the scholarship application.
- Applicants who are from underrepresented racial, ethnic, cultural, and other diverse backgrounds.

**17.What is a “Certificant Registry”**

- The Certificant Registry is an online database administered and maintained by the certifying entity. The database is searchable and includes the full legal name of all Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (“Certificant”) and the status of their certification.

**18.Will I get a job after I get certified?**

- The certification confirms that the individual has met the minimum requirements to be certified as a peer support specialist. The certification does not guarantee employment.

**19. May a person interested in out-of-state reciprocity participate in the scholarship process.**

- No. Individuals seeking certification under the out-of-state reciprocity process are not eligible for participation in the scholarship program.



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## **20. What are the steps to apply for a scholarship?**

- a) Applicants are required to register through the CaIMHSA Certification website following the recommendation by the county they are working or volunteering in for a scholarship.
- b) Applicant is required to watch the “Orientation and Self-Assessment for Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists in California” video.
- c) Applicant shall complete the scholarship application. The scholarship application consists of 1 question requiring a brief narrative response.
- d) Awardee shall select where to receive training from a list of approved training entities and shall follow registration information as required by the approved training entity. The list of approved training entities is available on the CaIMHSA Certification website.
- e) Awardee shall present the scholarship code to the approved training entity during registration.
- f) Awardee shall register to take the exam prior to November 30, 2022, or scholarship shall be forfeited and invalid. Unused or expired scholarships will be returned to a “general inventory pool” (not county specific) and will be distributed to peers on waitlist.
- g) Awardee shall successfully pass the state-approved exam to receive certification for Peer Support Specialist.

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