

November 2022

Certifying Peer Support Specialists for Medi-Cal Reimbursement

In 2020, California passed a law (Senate Bill 803) that makes it possible for certified peer support specialists to be eligible for Medi-Cal reimbursement through county mental health plans and substance use disorder plans (behavioral health plans). 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 will be responsible for adhering to Medi-Cal operational and reimbursement standards and processes, 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. In October 2021, it initiated community listening sessions to gather information from the peer community and other stakeholders to inform development of an optimal certification program. Other key activities include:

- *Further uplifting the voice of peers:* CalMHSA developed the [Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists Stakeholder Advisory Council](#) to ensure the peer voice remains at the forefront of the program's development and convening monthly meetings
- *Maximizing disbursement of scholarship funding:* Rolling out early scholarship funding and helping counties use the funding available to them from the State
- *Building a standardized curriculum:* Convening national experts to develop a curriculum that meets certification requirements; issuing an RFP and selecting training providers; developing standards for areas of specialization
- *Applying national standards and best practices for exam development:* Completing initial administration of the state-approved certification for a volunteer group of early test takers through a third-party exam proctor

- *Streamlining information and assistance:* Building an online process for applying and scholarship requests at a [dedicated website](#); developing a [Guidelines, Standards, and Procedures Manual](#); and [providing](#) technical assistance for participants and for counties

Areas of upcoming focus are:

- Completing the administration of scholarships
- Applying valuable information gained from the early initial exam to inform a refined exam process that will be open to all in December 2022
- Enforcing professional standards, and investigating potential consumer complaints and disciplinary actions for Code of Ethics violations
- Opening the application process for additional training providers

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, continues to collaborate with the [California Association of Mental Health Peer Run Organizations](#), and receives technical assistance from DHCS.

WHERE can individuals find out more about scholarships, and training?

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