



Mental Health Peer Support Provider Certification Program

Current Conceptualization of Certification Process

This document provides an overview of the mental health peer support provider certification program, as currently conceptualized, based on stakeholder recommendations and Department of Mental Health approvals.

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Overview

In fall 2022, the Vermont Department of Mental Health sponsored a series of stakeholder meetings to identify a model and develop an implementation plan for a statewide, mental health peer support certification program in Vermont. Stakeholders reached consensus on the broad outline of such a program and the Department of Mental Health accepted the stakeholders' recommendations.

For more information about the stakeholder process, please refer to [Mental Health Peer Support Certification Stakeholder Meetings: Report and Recommendations](#) and/or visit wildalwhite.com/certification.

In 2023 and 2024, during phases two and three of the certification process, stakeholders made additional recommendations, which the Department of Mental Health considered. Some recommendations were accepted, others were not.

The current conceptualization of Vermont's mental health peer support provider program is based on the stakeholder recommendations, as adopted by the Department of Mental Health.

Brief Description of the Peer Support Certification Program

In the current conceptualization of the peer support certification program, adult, certified peer support providers will be trained to support adult recipients of peer support. Currently, there are no plans for family peer support or youth peer support. However, the program as currently conceptualized would provide a foundation for both family peer support, youth peer support, as well peer support specialties such as forensic, geriatric, LGBTQIA, etc.

Eligibility

To be eligible for certification, prospective mental health peer support providers must:

- (1) Be at least 18 years old;
- (2) Confirm [lived experience](#) of trauma, mental health and/or substance use challenge;
- (3) Successfully complete Intentional Peer Support (core, advanced or trainer);
- (4) Perform 250 hours of supervised, paid or volunteer peer support in the two years before applying for certification; and

- (5) Undergo [criminal history and registry checks](#) as described in state regulations governing certification for certified peer support providers.

A criminal conviction will not automatically disqualify an individual from certification; however, applicants must disclose a criminal history at the time they apply for certification. Such applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis in accord with governing regulations by the Office of Professional Responsibility.

Provisional Status

If an applicant is unable to document the provision of 250 hours of supervised, paid or volunteer peer support in the two years before applying for certification, Vermont plans to offer provisional status to such applicants if they pass the credentialing examination and sign the code of ethics, attesting that they will abide by the code of ethics for certified peer support providers in the State of Vermont.

Certification Process

As currently conceptualized, certification will be a three-step process, which will include (1) screening and training; (2) credentialing; and (3) certification.

Screening and Training. Screening involves ensuring applicants meet the minimum standards before applying for certification. Training involves delivering the approved curriculum for prospective, certified mental health peer support providers.

Screening and training will be the responsibility of a peer-run entity, selected following a competitive, Request for Proposal process.

Additional information about screening and training is available in the [screening application](#).

Credentialing. Credentialing is the process of determining whether an applicant has completed the requirements for certification, which include passing the credentialing examination, signing the Code of Ethics, and documenting the provision of at least 250 hours of supervised, paid or volunteer peer support in the two years before applying for certification.

Credentialing will be the responsibility of a peer-run entity, selected following a competitive, Request for Proposal process.

After confirming that an applicant has completed the requirements for certification, the credentialing entity will grant the applicant a peer support provider credential, which the applicant will submit to the Office of Professional Regulation at the time the applicant applies for certification.

Certification. Certification is the process of determining whether the applicant has met the qualifications for certification, which included obtaining a credential from the credentialing entity, paying the applicable fee, and undergoing [criminal history and registry checks](#).

Certifications will expire after two years, after which they must be renewed.

Certification will be the responsibility of the Office of Professional Regulation.

The following table delineates the duties and responsibilities, as currently envisioned, of each entity in the certification process.

Screening/Training	Credentialing	Certification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screen applicants for eligibility (at least 18 years old; lived experience of trauma, mental health or substance use challenge; completion of IPS) • Select applicants for training program • Train prospective, certified mental health peer support providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administer the statewide credentialing examination to eligible candidates • Grade the statewide credentialing examination • Verify successful test takers have provided at least 250 hours of supervised paid or volunteer peer support services in the two years before passing the examination • Verify that successful test takers have signed the Code of Ethics • Process applications from grandfathered applicants • Process applications from out-of-state, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receive applications for certification; grant and renew certifications; deny, revoke, suspend, reinstate, or condition certifications • Oversee appeal procedure • Administer fees collected • Refer disciplinary matters to administrative law officer • Adopt and amend rules necessary to administer certification program

Screening/Training	Credentialing	Certification
	certified peer support providers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve continuing education courses • Approve continuing education providers 	

Certification through Alternate Path

Some individuals will be eligible for certification through an alternate path. Eligible applicants will be provided a test preparation workbook and a test date.

Eligible candidates for the alternate path must pass a test designed specifically for alternate path applicants. The test will include questions about the code of ethics for certified peer support providers in the state of Vermont; the Vermont mental health system; and Intentional Peer Support. The test will be administered by the credentialing entity. The credentialing entity will issue a credential to alternate path applicants who pass the credentialing examination and sign the code of ethics.

To complete the certification process, alternate path applicants must submit the credential issued by the credentialing entity to the certifying entity, i.e., the Office of Professional Regulation, whereupon the Office of Professional Regulation will issue a credential if the alternate path applicant pays the applicable fee and undergoes the criminal history and registry review.

Eligibility Criteria for Alternate Path

1. Be employed as peer support provider in Vermont, paid or unpaid, on January 1, 2024, and at the time of application for certification.
2. Apply for certification through the alternate path by December 31, 2025.
3. Be at least 18 years old.
4. Self-attest to [lived experience](#) of trauma, mental health and/or substance use challenge.

5. Undergo [criminal history and registry checks](#) as described in state regulations governing certification for certified peer support providers.
6. Agree to adhere to the [Code of Ethics](#) for certified peer support providers.
7. Meet at least one of the following peer support provider supervised experience requirements: (1) one year, paid or unpaid, supervised work experience with a minimum accumulation of 1,550 hours of experience as a peer support provider; or (2) minimum of 1,500 supervised hours in three years with 500 supervised hours completed within the 12 months before the date of application for certification
8. Have completed Intentional Peer Support training (core, advanced or trainer)
9. Pass the statewide certification examination for alternate path applicants

More information about the alternate path to certification can be found in the [alternate path application](#).

Certification through Reciprocity

In the context of mental health peer support provider certification, reciprocity is the recognition by one state of the validity of a certification or credential granted by another state. In theory, reciprocity would allow certified mental health peer support providers to transfer their credentials between jurisdictions. However, in practice, reciprocity does not result in an automatic transfer of credentials from one jurisdiction to another. Rather, reciprocity offers an alternative path to credentialing or certification.

Most states do not offer certification through reciprocity. However, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has encouraged states to offer an alternative path to certification by reciprocity.

Vermont will offer mental health peer support provider certification by reciprocity to eligible individuals.

Reciprocity Eligibility Criteria

All individuals with current and active, out-of-state, mental health peer support provider certifications will be required to meet the following requirements at the time of application to receive certification through reciprocity:

1. Be at least 18 years of age;
2. Have [lived experience](#) of trauma, mental health and/or substance use challenge;
3. Demonstrate successful completion of Intentional Peer Support (IPS) training;
4. Document at least one year of paid or unpaid employment (1550 hours) or 1550 hours in three (3) years of employment as a peer support provider;
5. Have a current and active mental health peer support provider certification in a state other than Vermont;
6. Have no pending disciplinary actions or unresolved complaints in the state in which the certification was issued;
7. Have completed 20 hours of continuing education in the two years before the date of the reciprocity application, including six hours of ethics;
8. Agree to adhere to the code of ethics for certified mental health peer support providers in the State of Vermont;
9. Undergo criminal background and registry checks; and
10. Pass the abbreviated certification examination for out-of-state, certified mental health peer support providers and alternate path peer support providers.

More information about reciprocity can be found in the [reciprocity application](#).

Core Competencies, Curriculum and Training

During the mental health peer certification stakeholder meeting process, stakeholders recommended a set of [core competencies](#) for certified peer support providers in Vermont. To master the core competencies, Vermont's training will include:

- (1) Intentional Peer Support as a pre-requisite;
- (2) A review of Intentional Peer Support, including hearing voices, and supporting individuals thinking about suicide;
- (3) A wellness curriculum adapted from [Taking Action](#);¹ and
- (4) A Vermont-specific curriculum.

The Vermont-specific curriculum will include the following modules:

- (1) Code of Ethics, Including Privacy;
- (2) Collaborative Documentation;

¹ The training will **not** include Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP) but rather a two-day, non-proprietary training on wellness.

- (3) Links to Resources, Services, and Supports, including the Vermont Mental Health System;
- (4) Change Facilitation;
- (5) Conflict management and managing difficult conversations;
- (6) Privilege, power, and bias;
- (7) Facilitation skills;
- (8) History of peer support and peer support movement;
- (9) How to give and receive feedback;
- (10) Workplace etiquette (e.g., email, telephone, dress code, language, managing power imbalances, code switching)

Some stakeholders suggested that the curriculum include a module on critical psychiatry. The Department of Mental Health did not accept this suggestion. The curriculum will not include critical psychiatry, which is a branch of psychiatry that critically examines the assumptions, practices, and effects of mainstream society. It challenges the dominant biomedical model, and instead promotes a more holistic, person-centered approach to mental health care. Critical psychiatry advocates for understanding the social, cultural, and psychological factors that contribute to mental health issues and calls for greater emphasis on human rights and the social determinants of health. According to the Department of Mental Health, the curriculum may include a holistic, human rights approach “but not as a challenge to the medical model.”

The curriculum will include an overview of the Vermont mental health system levels of care and how to access supports, and the grievance and appeal system.

The curriculum will include a high-level overview of the children's mental health system with the goal of enabling peer support providers to provide initial guidance to parents about seeking mental health supports for their children and help transition-age young people access care if they wish.

The curriculum will include information about HIPPA but only to convey that communications between peer support providers and recipients are not 100 percent confidential.

The curriculum will include information about what documentation is required for purposes of insurance, including Medicaid.

The duration of the training will be up to 15 days.

The training will include a variety of instructional strategies, including:

- Role plays: Opportunities to practice, reflect, and receive supportive feedback based on cohort and facilitator observation.

- Case Method
- Solitary writing. Participants respond to questions with a brief written response
- Pair and share or turn to a neighbor
- Small group activities
- Large group share out. At the end of a small group activity, participants from the small groups share their learning to the large group
- Large group activities or discussions. All participants are involved in an activity
- Reading. There is content that must be covered through reading.
- Demonstration. Opportunities for facilitators to briefly demonstrate a procedure, process, or skill.
- Debrief. Opportunities to highlight key learning moments following skill practice or demonstration.

A Note about the Case Method

Certain core competencies will be taught through the case method. Participants recall concepts better when they are set in a case, much as people remember words better when they are used in context. Cases teach participants how to apply theory in practice and how to create theory from practice. The case method cultivates the capacity for critical analysis, judgment, decision-making, and action, all of which are required in ethical decision-making, managing conflict, power and privilege, and facilitating change.

As envisioned, the case method is a four-step process:

- (1) Read and analyze the case. The case is written from the viewpoint of a real person with lived experience working in the mental health system. The cases will provide background information on the situation and will end in a key decision to be made. Participants must sift through the information, incomplete by design, and decide what to do.
- (2) Discuss the case in small group. After reading and analyzing the case on their own, participants will bring their ideas to a small group of fellow participants to share their ideas and listen to other ideas. Participants will begin to see the case from different perspectives.
- (3) Engage in class with the larger group. After the breakout groups, the class will be brought back together, and the class will discuss what is the best path forward for the protagonist. When done well, this is a highly engaged conversation facilitated by the trainers, but driven by the participants' comments and experiences. The class

discussion helps participants develop communication, listening, analysis, and leadership skills in a dynamic and immersive learning environment.

- (4) **Reflect.** After the discussion, participants are asked to reflect on the class discussion to prepare for facing similar situations in their future roles.

Recertification

Certifications will expire after two years, after which they must be renewed. To renew a certification, applicants will be required to pay a fee and submit documentation sufficient to demonstrate that they have met the minimum continuing education requirements.

Minimum Continuing Education Requirements

1. Certified peer support providers must document 20 hours of relevant, continuing education, including at least six hours devoted to ethics in the two years before the expiration of a peer support provider's certification.
2. Certified peer support providers must participate in at least one IPS co-reflection gathering in each quarter (eight in total) in the two years before the expiration of the peer support provider's certification. Co-reflection gatherings must be facilitated by an individual trained in Intentional Peer Support; be at least one hour in duration; must not include as a co-participant a peer support provider's director supervisor or employer; and must offer a certificate of attendance.
3. Relevant continuing education includes training, education, and coursework related to the peer support provider [core competencies](#), wellness and recovery, and the [code of ethics](#) for certified peer support providers in Vermont.

Up to four hours of relevant continuing education may be obtained through self-study.

Courses offered to the public, in-service trainings offered by an employer for all employees, and courses taught by mental health clinicians are not eligible for continuing education credit (unless pre-approved by the credentialing entity).

4. Courses, workshops and/or trainings must be pre-approved by the credentialing entity. The credentialing entity will grant approval upon a showing that the course is

non-medical, and consistent with peer support principles, values, and the code of ethics for certified peer support providers in the State of Vermont.

5. Certified peer support providers are responsible for maintaining a record of continuing education units for the purpose of recertification. Records should be retained for a minimum of three years from the date of the application for recertification, in the event the peer support provider is audited.
6. Each year, the credentialing entity will randomly audit 10 percent of certified peer support providers.

In the event of noncompliance, the audited certified peer support provider will have up to six months to comply, during which time the individual's certification will be suspended. A certified peer support provider may not provide certified peer support during the period of suspension. Failure to comply within six months will result in the loss of certification.

7. Continuing education units are not transferable to any other certification period.
8. Continuing education units earned before initial certification are not eligible to be used for maintaining certification.
9. Continuing education credit may be received only once for a training event, even if the course was repeated during different certification periods
10. A continuing education unit is equivalent to one clock hour. Non-program hours, such as breaks, social hours, registration time, and mealtimes, are excluded.
11. Any continuing education units that must be completed as the result of a disciplinary order by the Office of Professional Regulation may not be used to satisfy the continuing education requirement.
12. No more than four hours of continuing education may be completed by self-study.
13. A certified peer support provider may request an exemption from continuing education requirements upon a showing of hardship.

More information about continuing education can be found in the [recertification application](#).

Office of Professional Regulation Rulemaking Process

On June 10, 2024, Governor Scott signed [H.847 \(Act 170\)](#), an act relating to peer support provider and peer recovery support specialist certification.

H.847 (2023 Act 170), adds peer support providers and peer recovery support specialists as professions regulated by the Office of Professional Regulation (OPR).

Section 2 authorizes OPR to inquire into the criminal background histories of applicants for initial certification and certificate renewal. The extent of this inquiry will be determined during the rulemaking process.

Sections 3 and 3a set the initial certification fee and the biennial renewal fee for peer support providers and peer recovery support specialists at \$50.

Section 4 of the act establishes a new chapter in Title 26 pertaining to the regulation of peer support providers and peer recovery support specialists. Section 4 also:

- (a) defines “peer support” and “recovery support services” among other terms;
- (b) indicates that the work of noncertified peer support providers or noncertified peer recovery support specialists is not prohibited under the act;
- (c) requires that an individual be certified if the individual calls themselves a certified peer support provider or certified peer recovery support specialist;
- (d) establishes the duties of the Director of the Office of Professional Regulation under the chapter;
- (e) establishes eligibility for certification;
- (f) establishes eligibility to serve as an advisor to the Director; and
- (g) articulates what constitutes unprofessional conduct for a peer support provider and peer recovery support specialist.

Sec. 5 requires the Director of the Office of Professional Regulation to adopt rules for the implementation of the chapter.

The rulemaking process is a process in which the public may participate. The following are the steps in the rulemaking process.

1. Development of initial draft rule language

2. Feedback from interested parties on draft rule language
3. Finalization of rule language and formally submit to the Interagency Committee on Administrative Rules
4. Submission to the Secretary of State’s Office
5. Public hearing period
6. Submission to Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules
7. Effective date July 1, 2025

Summary of Hyperlinks

Description	Link
Phase One stakeholder meeting report	<i>Mental Health Peer Support Certification Stakeholder Meetings: Report and Recommendations</i>
Video recordings, PowerPoint slides regarding stakeholder meetings	wildalwhite.com/certification
Core competencies	Peer Support Provider core competencies
Code of Ethics	Code of Ethics
Screening Application	Screening Application
Alternate Path Application	Application for Alternate Path
Reciprocity Application	Application for Reciprocity
Taking Action wellness curriculum	Taking Action
Recertification/Continuing Education	Application for Recertification
August 13, 2024 Update Meeting Video Recording	https://vimeo.com/1001159752

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Description	Link
H.847, an act relating to peer support provider and peer recovery support specialist certification	https://peercertification.wildalwhite.com/yc6ur6nd