

Certified Peer Specialists: FAQs for Employers

What is a Certified Peer Specialist?

A Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) is a person who has been trained to effectively share his or her experiences with recovery to carry the message that recovery is real and possible for all people. In sharing their experience, strength, and hope with others, including people utilizing mental health services, mental health providers, and policy makers, Peer Specialists can significantly impact people's belief about their own capacity to recover and the capacity of all people to recover and transform their lives.

Who is qualified to be a Certified Peer Specialist?

Qualified candidates must meet all of the following criteria:

- Self-identification as a person with lived experience of behavioral health challenges and recovery. "Lived experience" refers to the direct personal experience of behavioral health challenges, either currently or in the past.
- A minimum age of at least 18 years and a high school diploma or equivalent.
- Certification in the State of Kansas to provide the service, which includes successful completion of the Certified Peer Specialist training and two written examinations that measure specific skill sets.

How do I inquire if a job applicant is a consumer during the hiring process?

When interviewing for a position that requires the candidate to be a person with "lived experience," recent USpra conference recommends this language: "Are you comfortable self-identifying as a person who has faced mental health challenges?" Self-identifying as a person who has faced behavioral health challenges should be included in the job description and/or requirements with a clear explanation of what the term means. If you have any questions about the "lived experience" qualification, please contact Simon Messmer at simon.messmer@wichita.edu or 316.712.9500.

A frequently used interview question that has proved successful is, "Tell us about your recovery experience." Persons who relate a primary experience of substance abuse are not eligible for certification as Peer Specialists. Dual diagnosis (experiencing both behavioral health and substance abuse challenges) meets eligibility requirements so long as applicants understand that they will work out of their primary experience with mental health challenges.



You cannot ask, "Have you had a mental illness?" The Americans with Disability Act (ADA) prohibits you from asking about the presence or severity of any disabling condition. For further information on the impact of the ADA on hiring practices, please consult your agency's human resources manager.

For those who fear that an otherwise qualified person who does not face mental health challenges would have a complaint against the agency for not hiring him or her, this is not the case. Everyone has a race, age, gender, and sexual orientation, and as such, those are protected against discrimination. Not everyone has a disability. Therefore, people without disabilities are not protected – they cannot successfully claim to be discriminated against because they did not get a job opened only to persons with disability.

What training is required for certification as a Certified Peer Specialist?

The qualified person can complete the Certified Peer Support Level One and Two trainings sponsored by the Wichita State University Center for Community Support and Research. Those hired as Certified Peer Specialists have one year from the date they begin billing for services to complete both trainings and pass the corresponding examinations. Information about the training and the registration process is available on this site.

There is a requirement that Certified Peer Specialists must be supervised by a qualified Peer Support Supervisor. How do we meet this requirement?

At this time, there is no statewide definition for a qualified Peer Support Supervisor. The most promising practice would be that Certified Peer Specialists are supervised by a peer with peer support experience and receive assistance in developing supervisory skills. Clinical supervision must be provided by a Qualified Mental Health Professional or designated Licensed Mental Health Professional with experience regarding the specialized services provided by Certified Peer Specialists.

What is the role of the Certified Peer Specialist in treatment planning and 90-day reviews?

Involvement of a Certified Peer Specialist is expected in the treatment planning process for every individual receiving peer support services (including SED Transitional Age Youth) – based on medical necessity and with the consumer's consent. A CPS can help individual consumers articulate in their own words their personal life goals and aspirations in the development and achievement of their individualized plan. Involvement in the 90-day review depends on agency procedures.