

Becoming a Certified Peer Counselor

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery's (DBHR's) requirements to qualify as a Certified Peer Counselor (CPC)?

Certification has four steps:

1. Submit your application with your online training certificate for approval;
2. Be accepted to a training;
3. Successfully complete a 40-hour approved training; and
4. Pass the state exam.

You will need to complete the online class and send in a completion certificate with your application before being invited to a training.

Upon passing the CPC test, you will receive a letter confirming you have met certification requirements. Many employers also require credentialing from the Washington Department of Health as an [Agency Affiliated Counselor](#) after being hired. This credential is only required if your Agency is providing Medicaid billable services.

What are the application requirements?

Applicants must:

1. Identify as a consumer of mental health services. *Consumer* means:
 - Someone who has applied for, is eligible for, or has received mental health services.
 - For a child under the age of 13, or for a child age 13 or older whose parents or legal guardians are involved in the treatment plan, the definition of consumer includes parents or legal guardians.
2. Be 18 or older.
3. Have a high school diploma or GED (this requirement may be waived or delayed in some circumstances).
4. Be in mental health recovery for at least one year.
5. Demonstrate qualities of leadership.
6. Demonstrate proficiency in reading comprehension and writing skills.
7. Be willing to share your personal story of recovery.

What if I am a peer with a substance use or co-occurring disorder?

Currently, licensing and training are only available to peers with mental health challenges or with a co-occurring substance use disorder. This exclusion is due to funding and Medicaid rules.

Where do I find an application?

The training application is available at <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/bha/division-behavioral-health-and-recovery/peer-support>. The application includes an **instructions page**, which should be followed carefully.

How do I apply for training?

When CPC trainings are posted on the peer support webpage, you may send your application (and completion certificates for the online class). Once your application is received, it will be reviewed and scored. Applications which are incomplete or do not meet training qualifications will be returned. Your application will be kept on file for one year, and considered for all trainings in your area and for statewide trainings. Trainers will contact you regarding class openings or if a class fills.

When do I complete the online training?

- The online training must be complete before being considered for an in-person training.
- Submit your online certificate with your application or within 10 business days of your approval letter.
- The course takes about 10-12 hours to complete.
- You will want to read carefully and take notes as some information is included on the test and not covered in the training.

What can I do if my application is not approved?

You may send a request to DBHR to have your application reconsidered. You may also send a new application. A second person at DBHR will look at your application and will let you know if it is approved.

How do I complete an exception to education requirement letter?

If you have not received a high school diploma or GED, you may apply for an educational requirement exemption. You must write your own letter of request, without help. Your letter should explain the circumstances that have prevented you from completing the educational requirement, describe how you have gained comparable reading and writing abilities, and outline your plan to complete the education requirement. The letter must demonstrate high school level writing skills. Letters are sent to DBHR.

How are training participants chosen?

When trainings are scheduled, participants are invited using various criteria, such as those already employed, those living in the area of the training, or those scoring highly on their applications. Applicants generally must be interested in becoming CPCs for Medicaid billing agencies, as our funding usually does not allow training for other professional development or personal growth. There are usually far more training requests than there are training spaces. Applicants will be notified whether they have been selected to attend the requested training.

Is there a waiting list?

Yes, for most trainings. If you are already employed as a peer counselor you have higher priority. After one year you must submit an updated application.

Trainings and Tests

What types of training are available?

There are currently three CPC trainings available:

1. Standard training;
2. Family and Youth training; and
3. Spanish training.

All trainings result in the same certification. There is a box on the application form to indicate preferences. Trainings may be sponsored either by the State of Washington or a Behavioral Health Organization (BHO). All known training dates and locations are listed on the website. BHOs limit trainings to participants in their region.

What is the Family/Youth training?

DBHR has a unique curriculum for the Family and Youth CPC training. This training, while covering the same topics as the Standard training, is specifically designed to prepare parent and youth CPCs. Parents and youth often benefit from learning with a larger group of their peers. There is no age requirement for the youth training, but applicants are expected to be of a similar age or have substantial experience working with youth. **The ability to form true “peer” relationships is essential.** Parents and youth are welcome to take the Standard training as well. Individuals working on WISe teams are required to take a Family/Youth training.

What is the application process?

Applicants print and fill out the application form on the website, carefully following all instructions. Applications are sent to DBHR, and after evaluation, a confirmation letter will be mailed to you.

How much does training cost?

There is no cost for the peer counseling training, training materials, or the test. Trainings that are offered regionally provide snacks and lunch, while statewide trainings also provide lodging and all meals.

Is there funding for travel expenses?

Most CPC trainings are regional and there is no travel funding available. DBHR offers two statewide trainings, with lodging and meals provided. BHOs do not provide travel funds. For the Youth/Family trainings there are limited travel funds available primarily for people coming from long distances within the region. Youth/Family applicants should contact WSU for more information. If you apply for a statewide training, the trainer will contact you about your needs.

What is the training like?

All trainings are 36 hours in length. The CPC test is usually scheduled the last afternoon of the training. Most trainings occur over five days, although a few are split over two weeks or weekends. Students primarily study the peer counselor manual, which includes many individual and group activities. Trainings are interactive, with students expected to participate in activities and discussions. To receive a training completion certificate, participants must also pass skill checks during the training.

What is the certified peer counseling test like?

The DBHR test is administered by Washington State University. The test will be held either at the training location during the week, or near the training location approximately two to three weeks after training. The test has a written multiple choice section and an oral section involving a small panel.

Applicants have five attempts to pass the test. They may then request re-training, but this opportunity is not guaranteed.

How is DBHR's peer counseling program different from other peer programs?

Many organizations provide peer support and training. Some examples are Peer to Peer, Intentional Peer Support (IPS), Recovery Innovations training, and recovery coach training. Although these programs may be very helpful to individuals, DBHR has no authority or oversight of these programs. DBHR's program of peer support is the only state-approved pathway to qualify to work in a Medicaid funded agency.

Who should I contact for more information?

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