

**Bulletin Number:** MSA 21-38

**Distribution:** Prepaid Inpatient Health Plans (PIHPs), Community Mental Health Services Programs (CMHSPs)

**Issued:** November 1, 2021

**Subject:** Peer Support Specialist Certification

**Effective:** December 1, 2021

**Programs Affected:** Medicaid, Healthy Michigan Plan

## **PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST SERVICES**

### **Peer Support Specialist Services**

Peer support specialists are individuals with a strong personal knowledge of what it is like to have first-hand lived experience with a mental health condition that has caused a substantial life disruption. A substantial life disruption is defined as experiencing some or all of the following: homelessness, mental health crises, trauma, lack of employment, criminal justice involvement, discrimination, stigma/prejudice intensified by mental health challenges, receiving public benefits due to poverty.

Beneficiaries share mutual experiences in their journey of recovery with the peer support specialist. This mutuality is the foundation of what is referred to as “peerness” between a peer support specialist and beneficiary seeking recovery, promoting connection, and offering hope. As a state and national expectation, peer support specialists are trained and skillful in sharing their recovery story as a method of engaging beneficiaries.

Peer support specialists inspire hope and support others experiencing similar situations. Through shared understanding and respect, they support people to become and stay engaged in the recovery process. Serving in a role as a community health worker, they support the beneficiary with their personal wellness and recovery. Peer support services can effectively extend the reach of treatment beyond the clinical setting into the everyday environment of those seeking a successful, sustained recovery process. Peer support specialists assist people in recovery to connect with their own inner strength, motivation, and desire to move forward in life, even when experiencing challenges.

Peer support specialists provide services and supports based on medical necessity criteria that is designed to assist the beneficiary to achieve their goals of community inclusion and participation, independence, recovery, resiliency and/or productivity. This medical necessity criteria is included in the person-centered planning process; listed in amount, scope and duration and documented in the individual plan of service.

Depending on their position description that is developed specifically by each individual agency, services that peer support specialists provide may include:

- Sharing their story through their lived experience of moving from hopelessness to hope;
- Co-facilitation with the beneficiary in development and implementation of recovery goals in the individual plan of service completed through a person-centered planning process;
- Integration of physical and mental health care, including the development of wellness plans;
- Developing, implementing and providing health and wellness supports to address preventable risk factors for chronic conditions;
- Advocate and assist with opportunities to engage in self-directed care;
- Developing, implementing and facilitating support groups;
- Providing supportive services during and after crises;
- Supporting beneficiaries in completing psychiatric advance directives;
- Accessing benefits and utilizing public assistance;
- Navigating challenging and complex systems of care;
- Linking and engaging the beneficiary to community resources and formal/informal supports;
- Vocational assistance and support;
- Promoting, improving and educating whole health and self-management of chronic conditions,
- Housing assistance and support;
- Active engagement with individuals who have criminal justice involvement;
- Applies and models the five stages of recovery to assist beneficiaries in achieving their personal recovery goals

As an evidence-based practice, peer support is valuable not only for the person receiving services, but also for behavioral health and integrated care professionals including the systems in which they work. Peer support specialists educate their colleagues, advocate for, and advance the field by sharing their perspectives, recovery stories and experience in order to increase understanding of how recovery practices and policies may be improved to promote health and wellness. Research and experience show that peer support specialists have a transformative effect on both individuals and systems. Peer support has been shown to improve quality of life, improve engagement and satisfaction with services and supports, improve whole health including chronic conditions, decrease hospitalizations and inpatient days, and reduce the overall cost of services.

## **Supervision Requirements**

The Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) requires that peer support specialists must be supervised by a Qualified Mental Health Professional (QMHP) as defined by the Medicaid Services Administration. The amount, duration and scope of supervision can vary depending on the demonstrated competency and experience of the peer support provider, as well as the service array, and may range from direct oversight to periodic care consultation.

## **Certification Requirements**

Individuals who are working as peer support specialists in a Medicaid service delivery system serving beneficiaries with mental health conditions must:

- Be at least 18 years of age;
- Have a high school diploma, General Education Diploma (GED), or provide college transcripts in lieu of a high school diploma or GED;
- Primary diagnosis of a mental health condition;
- Have a strong personal knowledge of what it is like to have first-hand lived experience with a mental health condition that has caused a substantial life disruption;
- Has been a recipient of mental health treatment and/or services for at least one year, with a substantial life disruption due to their mental health condition;
- Have personal experience in navigating complex mental health treatment services;
- Self-identifies as having a mental health condition with a substantial life disruption and shares their recovery story in supporting others;
- Be employed by a CMHSP or contract provider at the beginning of training;
- Meet the MDHHS application approval process for specialized training and certification;
  - Completed peer support specialist application
  - Supervisor signature and acknowledgment form
  - Two written letters of reference
  - Current job description
  - Read, understand, and agree to peer code of ethics
  - Acknowledgement of truthfulness and accuracy of application
  - Peer-to-peer interview
  - Training fee paid by the agency that employs the peer support specialist
- Attend professional advancement opportunities to maintain skills;
- Be freely chosen by beneficiaries utilizing peer support services; and
- Adhere to the MDHHS Peer Support Specialist Code of Ethics.

## Manual Maintenance

Retain this bulletin until the information is incorporated into the MDHHS Medicaid Provider Manual.

## Questions

Any questions regarding this bulletin should be e-mailed to Provider Inquiry, Department of Health and Human Services, at [ProviderSupport@michigan.gov](mailto:ProviderSupport@michigan.gov). When you submit questions, be sure to include your name, affiliation, NPI number, and phone number so you may be contacted if necessary. Providers may phone toll-free 1-800-292-2550.

An electronic version of this document is available at [www.michigan.gov/medicaidproviders](http://www.michigan.gov/medicaidproviders) >> Policy, Letters & Forms.

## Approved

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Massey', followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Kate Massey, Director  
Medical Services Administration