

WIOA Desk Reference

Opioid Addiction and Substance Use Disorder

Peer Recovery Workers and Careers

Who are Peer Recovery Workers? Peer recovery workers or peer support workers are broadly defined as people with lived experience in recovery from mental health and substance use challenges who provide non-clinical, strengths-based support to others seeking their own, individualized, person-centered recovery.¹ Peers help people with opioid use disorder to be more likely to achieve sustained, long-term recovery by extending the reach of treatment beyond the clinical setting and modeling ongoing coping and recovery skills.

What do they do?

Peer recovery workers, such as peer recovery support specialists and peer recovery coaches, draw on their personal experience with substance use disorder treatment and recovery to help engage people with substance use disorder in the recovery process and reduce their likelihood of relapse. The major types of peer services include providing peer mentoring or coaching, connecting people to recovery resources, facilitating and leading recovery groups, and helping people in recovery build community.²

Certification Requirements:

Peer support workers must complete a state-approved training to receive certification. Requirements for certification vary by state but typically include completing a minimum number of classroom training hours and hands-on field hours, taking a certification exam, and having a minimum amount of time in recovery oneself. Some states also require a background check and application fees. In some cases, the time in recovery is not a state requirement but is preferred by employers hiring for these positions.

Benefits to the American Job Center Network:

As part of allowable WIOA career services, the workforce system can provide more comprehensive employment services to people with substance use disorder (SUD) while also developing the health care workforce to address the opioid crisis. The workforce system can support individuals in achieving certification by providing access to supportive services, necessary training and hands-on field experience through the-job training and registered apprenticeships. Peer recovery workers may also gain additional certification to move into higher positions in the recovery field; for example, some peers eventually become licensed alcohol and drug counselors.

There are several ways in which the American Job Center Network can assist Peer Recovery Workers and also how the Peer Recovery Workers may enhance the public workforce system:

Partnership: Peer workers work in a diverse range of settings such as hospitals, outpatient treatment facilities, recovery housing, criminal justice, and law enforcement. These service agencies and behavioral health organizations are often central partners with the AJC network. AJC staff may enhance participation by raising awareness of AJC services through these partnerships. Partner agencies may make referrals, offer on-the-job training for certification requirements, and enhance services for people in recovery who are work-ready. Peer recovery workers may also assist participants in the AJC.

Career Services: American Job Center career counselors may offer peer support work as a career path to participants who come to the AJC seeking career and training services and who share that they are affected by substance use disorder or opioid addiction. AJC staff may present participants with the peer recovery career option when they conduct a career assessment or provided other career counseling. As part of the AJC Network peer support workers can assist with basic career and individualized career services, to include:

Basic Career Services

- ◆ Providing information about programs and services, initial skills assessment, or help with enrollment forms.

¹ [Final.Comparative.Analysis.pdf \(peerrecoverynow.org\)](#)

² [Peers | SAMHSA](#), <https://www.samhsa.gov/brss-tacs/recovery-support-tools/peers>



- ◆ Conducting initial assessment of skill levels, including literacy, numeracy, and English language proficiency, as well as aptitudes, abilities, or
- ◆ Sharing labor market employment information.

Individualized Career Services:

- ◆ Development of an individual employment plan, to identify the employment goals, achievement objectives, and the combination of services for the participant to achieve his or her employment goals
- ◆ Group counseling, which involves two or more participants addressing certain issues, problems, or situations that may be shared by the group members
- ◆ Individual counseling, which is a one-on-one session that may go into greater detail for a participant regarding certain issues, problems, or situations.

Training Services: The American Job Center network can support individuals to pursue peer recovery careers by directly supporting training of peer recovery workers. The time commitments for these classroom-based trainings ranges and is typically more than 40 hours, with schedules ranging from full-time for a week to once a week (on Saturdays) for 10 weeks. Trainings may be offered by training partner agencies including community colleges, four-year colleges, and nonprofit training providers,

On-the-Job-Training: The American Job Center network can support individuals to pursue peer recovery careers by helping program participants gain the hours of field work needed for certification, such as through on-the-job training placements at recovery centers. Recovery centers may be receptive to taking participants for on-the-job training because WIOA funds may pay 50 percent of the trainee's salary during the training period. On-the-job training placements may last for six months at 20 hours per week, allowing participants to meet the 500 hours required for certification while being paid. During on-the-job training, participants may also work with a mentor in the organization in which they are placed.

Supportive Services: The American Job Center network can support individuals to pursue peer recovery careers by providing additional supportive services to help program participants achieve certification, such as paying for testing fees, criminal background checks, administrative fees, and fingerprinting.

Business Services: To support employers in developing recovery-supportive workplaces and hiring and retaining individuals in recovery, peer recovery workers may assist local workforce agencies and their business service representatives in connecting employers to program participants receiving concurrent outpatient treatment and job training services. They may also help to provide the support needed by employers to employ and retain program participants with substance use disorders. For more information about Recovery Friendly Workplaces, see the Department of Labor's Community of Practice and Resource Page.

For More information:

Department of Labor Resources:

- ◆ Dislocated Worker Grant Community of Practice: [WorkforceGPS](https://dwg.workforcegps.org/home/), <https://dwg.workforcegps.org/home/>
- ◆ [Strategy Spotlight. Registered Apprenticeships for Community Health Workers and Dually Certified Peer Recovery Specialist-Community Health Workers](#)
- ◆ [Video Case Studies: National Health Emergency Grant – Developing Peer Recovery Specialist Career Paths. Interview with Indiana and Rhode Island](#)
- ◆ [Department of Labor Training and Employment Notice \(TEN\) 2-21 - Serving Individuals and Communities Impacted by Opioid Addiction and Other Substance Use Disorders](#)

Other Resources:

- ◆ [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\) - Peer Workers](#)
 - ◆ [Peer Recovery Center for Excellence](#): Peer-led national center that provides training and technical assistance related to substance use disorder recovery. Housed at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), the center was authorized under Section 7152 of the SUPPORT Act for Patients and Communities and funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA).
 - ◆ [Comparative Analysis of State Requirements for Peer Support Specialist Training and Certification in the United States](#). This report reflects the current status of state approved training and certification for behavioral health peer support specialists in the 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia as of July 1, 2021. Information is summarized across states and the District of Columbia on a number of key indicators, including types of certifying entities, lived experience requirements, educational hours, work hours, exam requirements, criminal background checks, disqualifying offenses, fees for training and certification, and peer support specialist supervisor qualifications.
- ◆ [National Association for Addiction Professionals](#) - National Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist (NCPRSS). Experiential-based National Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist Credential to standardize the knowledge and competency of peer support to individuals with substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders.

