



# ACBHC Peer Support Certification Program Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

## **Peer Support Certification Training**

**Is there a difference between the requirement of 37.5 hours for basic Peer Support training outlined in the ACBHC matrices and applications and the 40 hours outlined by the State of Alaska Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) training requirements? Why is there a difference of one and a half hours?**

There is really no difference. The 40-hour course includes breaks and the 37.5 contact hours for the course.

**Can individuals who have previously taken the 40-hour course from a DBH-approved training provider use it to satisfy the requirement, even if it was a few years ago.**

Yes. The trainer must be a current DBH-approved trainer with a DBH-approved curriculum. A copy of the training certificate will be required in the application.

**Will Ionia's Peer Support Certification Training qualify?**

Ionia's Natural Peer Support Training 40-hour course is approved by the DBH. Ionia also offers other courses that ACBHC accepts for other Peer Support training requirements. Please check with Ionia or the Peer Support Training Guide on ACBHC's website, [www.akcertification.org](http://www.akcertification.org) for further information.

**If I have previously taken McShin, Peerstar or similar Peer Support Certification will it qualify under the grandparenting?**

Yes. This is an exception **only** for individuals applying for the "grandparenting" into Peer Support Professional Certification I. For these individuals, a 40-hour course is required but alternative multi-day trainings such as McShin, Peerstar, or others can be considered. At least 37.5 hours of training must be documented. A copy of the Training Certificate must accompany the application.

**The 40-hour course is not a requirement in the Grandparenting Matrix for Peer Support Professional II and III.**

**For the "Grandparenting Peer Support III" and the "Grandparenting Traditional Peer Support III", is the "Intro to Peer Support Course" required?**

No. The 40-hour course is not a requirement in the Grandparenting Matrix for Peer Support Professional II and III.



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## **Where can I obtain the list of available trainers?**

Click on the Training Guide icon in the Peer Support Portal. You will find the DBH-approved courses listed under Peer Support Training.

## **How can additional trainers be approved for the 40-hour course?**

Individuals or organizations interested in becoming DBH-approved training providers for the 40-hour Introduction to Peer Support Training should contact James McLaughlin ([james.mclaughlin@alaska.gov](mailto:james.mclaughlin@alaska.gov)) or Crystal Smith ([crystal.smith@alaska.gov](mailto:crystal.smith@alaska.gov)) with the State of Alaska Division of Behavioral Health.

## **What is the cost for the 40-hour Peer Support Certification training?**

Currently, there are many opportunities for individuals to receive the 40-hour training for free (at no charge). You may locate training opportunities on the ACBHC website, [www.akcertification.org](http://www.akcertification.org). A Training Guide is located under the Peer Support Portal. You may contact the trainers in the Training Guide to determine whether the training is free or for a cost.

## **Would training received in an apprenticeship for peer support professionals satisfy certification requirements?**

The apprenticeship must meet both DBH and ACBHC requirements for Peer Support Certification Training to meet the certification requirements.

## **Continuing Education Unit (CEU) Trainings**

### **For continuing education requirements, is there training available to allow us to satisfy these requirements?**

Visit ACBHC's website, [www.akcertification.org](http://www.akcertification.org). Click on the Peer Support Portal and the Training Guide. You will find a full list of training resources. These will include suggestions on where to access trainings for Ethics, Confidentiality, courses for Infectious Diseases & HIV/AIDS, as well as many other training topics.

ACBHC and DBH recognize the need to develop more local trainings on these topics. Many different entities, including the University of Alaska, are working on courses to fulfill requirements.



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## **Who are the accepted trainers for CEUs?**

For additional CEU trainings other than the 40-hour training, there are no specific requirements as to who can provide the training. ACBHC accepts CEU-hour courses from any organization or website that provides CEU-hour courses for counselors and peer support providers. CEU-hour courses must be approved by ACBHC, national and state universities, national and state governments, tribal governments, or national, state, and local addictions and mental health providers.

## **If we hold other certifications, can our CEU courses such as Ethics be used for all certifications?**

ACBHC requires that all applicants for Peer Support Professional certifications must take at least 3 hours each of courses for Ethics and Confidentiality within two years of their initial application or recertification. If you have taken Ethics or Confidentiality courses for other certifications, you can use these courses to satisfy Peer Support Professional training requirements only if your courses were taken within two years of your peer support application. Please submit copies of your certificates to show that you have taken these courses. Please submit certificates for all courses listed on your tally sheet no matter whether you took the courses for other certifications.

## **Can you tell us more about the qualifying education for Advanced Peer Support levels II and III? For example, will WRAP and/or WHAM Facilitator Training qualify? Or how about a Peer Wellness Coach training (such as they offer in Oregon?)**

Please list WRAP and/or WHAM Facilitator trainings under Recovery Action Planning on Peer Support Professional I, II, and III Tally Sheets. Please list Peer Wellness Coach training under Recovery Advocacy on Peer Support Professional I, II, and III Tally Sheets.

## **For the 3 CEU "Updated Ethics" Requirement, what is the guidance for the content for this training? Should these training be peer focused or do other Ethics CE trainings for behavioral health professionals work for this requirement? Does training already exist that meets this requirement?**

All Peer Support Professionals and Traditional Peer Support Professionals are required to take 3 hours each of courses for Ethics and Confidentiality for initial applications and subsequent recertifications. ACBHC hopes that you will take courses for Peer Support Ethics and Confidentiality whenever available. Currently, ACBHC also accepts Ethics courses for Chemical Dependency Counselors and Behavioral Health Counselors (mental health) for both initial applications as well as recertifications.



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**In general, for the additional CEU hours of training required for the Traditional and Peer Support Professionals Level II and III, do we know that enough training exists already to support this? Should these trainings be peer focused or do other CE trainings for behavioral health professionals work for this requirement? Is the hope that new trainings are developed? Is there funding to develop these new training?**

There is currently a good array of online trainings available for these CEUs. A list of resources for these trainings is available in the Peer Support Training Guide on the ACBHC Peer Support Portal. As mentioned above, ACBHC prefers peer-focused courses whenever possible. But given the limited availability of peer-focused trainings, any trainings addressing these topics are acceptable. There are some local Alaska peer support trainings available, and more are under development.

## Eligible Work Hours

**Do volunteer hours count as experience?**

Yes. Volunteer hours count as experience; however, they must be related to peer support duties. Please ask your volunteer coordinator to verify your volunteer hours on the Verification of Experience Form found within your application. Please ask them to mail the completed form to the ACBHC/Peer Support Program, P.O. Box 220109, Anchorage, AK 99522-0109.

**I am curious to learn more about what type of behavioral health services an agency would need to provide to be able to supervise a PSS? We work in the recovery realm but more in prevention and advocacy. Is there any way we could potentially staff a PSS?**

The expectation is that the agency provides direct support services. It's helpful to look at the Peer Support Certification Matrix and the 15 Practicum Competencies the individual is required to develop thorough work experience and supervision. Some of these include "Supporting recovery planning", "Developing health and wellness skills", and "Helping with managing crisis." Potential employers need to look at these 15 competencies and determine if their services can provide the opportunity for peer support worker to become competent in these areas through practice and supervision. If an employer is not certain, they can contact the ACBHC staff.

**Are there general set criteria for prior work experience or is it evaluated individually? Would hours spent working as a counselor tech, as a direct support professional or other positions count towards a peer support professional certification hours requirement.**

Peer Support Workers share their own experience of recovery and work from a position of mutuality instead of hierarchy, which is different from other "helping" and "support" positions.



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ACBHC requests that all work experience should be documented on the Employer Verification of Experience form found within the application. Please make copies of this form and send it to past and current employers.

ACBHC generally accepts the work experience of applicants whose job descriptions include the words, "Peer Support." Since "Peer Support" positions are relatively new, ACBHC allows employers and/or supervisors to determine and verify that certain percentages of the applicant's "work experience" equate to "peer support" hours. If this is not possible, ACBHC staff will work with applicants to determine whether they provide "peer support" services.

## **Can I work/volunteer as an independent contractor or do I have to work/volunteer for an organization?**

A certified peer support professional cannot work as an independent contractor or private practitioner. Certified peers must work within an organization and under supervision. The size of the organization is not a consideration. This is stated in the Code of Ethics which is part of each application for certification.

## **If I have been a peer support trainer who has worked in the field many years providing peer support, mentoring, and training, may I apply for Peer Support III or do I need to begin at Peer Support I?**

The Grandparenting process allows applicants to document their Work and Training Experience. Review the Matrices located <https://akcertification.org> under Forms in the Peer Support Portal to determine which level fits your training and experience. Once Grandparenting is over, applicants will be able to apply for Peer Support Professional II and III. They will need to complete the Peer Support Professional I Practicum as well as the Peer Support Professional II practicum or the Peer Support Professional I and II practicums as well as the Professional III practicum. They will also need to show that they have taken the required hours of training for whichever initial application they choose.

## **Verification of Work Hours**

### **How do you go about documenting hours from work?**

All "work experience" hours must be documented on the Peer Support Professional Employer Verification of Experience form found within your application. Please make copies of this form and send it to both past and current employers to show your hours of experience. Some Peer Support Professional applicants wonder how employers can document "Peer Support Hours" when their Job Title does not include the words, "Peer Support." In that case, the Employer Verification of Experience form asks the applicant's supervisor to calculate the average



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percentage of peer support duties. If the applicant's supervisor is unable to do so, ACBHC will contact the applicant for further information. Please ask your employer or supervisor to mail completed forms directly to the ACBHC/Peer Support Program, P.O. Box 220109, Anchorage, AK 99522-0109.

**Given that many employees in this field move from agency to agency how will the work hours be tracked? What verification will be needed to prove the hours happened?**

Every time you apply for a new Peer Support Professional or Traditional Peer Support Professional certification, you must show that you have the required "work experience" for each level of certification. For instance, if the certification level requires 6,000 hours of experience, you need to ask both current and past employers to complete the Verification of Experience form found within your application to document your 6,000 hours of experience. ACBHC totals the hours listed on each form submitted to ACBHC.

## Dual Certifications

**Can we get certification as peer support professional and peer support traditional peer support professional?**

Yes. You can apply for as many certifications as you choose. If you pay for at least two certifications at the same time, you will receive a discount. Please check the most expensive certification first; check the Second Certificate (\$25.00) next; then click on Purchase Certification. You can use this discount payment for recertifications as well.

**Is my understanding correct that if we want to apply for both a Peer Support and a Traditional Peer Support Certification, we just need to apply and pay for one of them, and just let you know that we would like both?**

No. The Peer Support Professional and Traditional Peer Support Professional are two **separate** applications. You need to complete and submit two separate applications, one for Peer Support Professional, the other for Traditional Peer Support Professional. However, when you pay for certification, you can receive a discount if you apply for both certifications at the same time. Please check the highest cost certification first; check the Second Certificate (\$25.00) next; then click on Purchase Certification. to access the "Shopping Cart" to pay for both certifications. You can also send ACBHC two checks, money orders, or cashier's checks, one for the first certification, the second for the second certification (\$25.00). You can use this discount payment for recertifications as well.



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## **Can someone be certified as a peer support professional and hold a certification for Chemical Dependency Technician or a Chemical Dependency Counselor?**

Yes. You can have more than one certification. The same rules above apply if you order and pay for two certifications at the same time.

## **I am working on my Chemical Dependency Counselor I certificate. How do I work toward the Peer Support Associate or Traditional Peer Support Associate?**

Please refer to the Peer Support Professional/Traditional Peer Support Professional Matrix. You need to submit **separate** applications for each certification. For the Associate level, no prior work experience is required. Keep in mind that each certification level has its own “work experience” requirements. In the future when you apply for Peer Support Professional I or Traditional Peer Support I, you may be able to document your work experience if your job description includes “Peer Support” in the title. You can also receive a discount if you pay for at least two certifications at the same time. Please check the highest cost certification first; check the Second Certificate (\$25.00) next; then click on Purchase Certification. to access the “Shopping Cart” to pay for both certifications.

## **Supervision**

### **Can you provide a definition or explanation of what constitutes direct supervision?**

Direct supervision can be face-to-face or through telehealth. It can be individual or group supervision. It is based on helping the individual develop the 15 Practicum Competencies listed in the Peer Support Certification Matrices.

### **Who can provide direct supervision?**

For purposes of this Certification, anyone formally designated within the organization to provide supervision can do so. However, for agencies billing Medicaid, there are Medicaid-specific requirements for who can provide supervision to peer support providers and those should be clarified by the quality assurance staff in those Medicaid billing agencies.

### **Can someone other than a supervisor such as a CDC I or II handle the supervision?**

Social Service Agencies and Organizations formally designate persons within their organization to provide peer support supervision.

### **Can direct supervision be provided as a group?**

Yes. Designated supervisors can provide supervision individually, in groups and/or via telehealth.





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## **Certification and Medicaid**

**Note:** ACBHC has received many questions pertaining to Medicaid and Certification. The Commission cannot answer questions about Medicaid billing. Questions regarding Medicaid billing should be directed to an organization's Quality Assurance staff and/or to the Division of Behavioral Health's Medicaid Unit mailbox, [mpassunit@alaska.gov](mailto:mpassunit@alaska.gov).

## **Other Topic Areas**

### **How long is Grandparenting available?**

Grandparenting started on January 22, 2021. Grandparenting is and was set to expire on December 31, 2021; however, Grandparenting could be extended. After Grandparenting expires individuals will no longer be able to apply for Grandparenting.

### **Will there be an exam to become a peer support professional?**

No. ACBHC does not require exams for Peer Support Professional and Traditional Peer Support Professional certifications.

### **Will my Alaska certification be transferable?**

Every state has their own Reciprocity requirements. ACBHC hopes but cannot guarantee that other states will accept ACBHC's certifications. Some states might require that you take the NAADAC National Certified Peer Recovery Support Specialist (NCPRSS) test. Please contact ACBHC ([acbhc@akcertification.org](mailto:acbhc@akcertification.org)) if you would like to take this test. ACBHC is also developing Reciprocity for current Behavioral Health Aides and persons who already hold Peer Support Specialist certifications from the Lower 48 and elsewhere to become Peer Support Professionals in Alaska.

### **After people become certified is it up to them to find employment? At one time there was a discussion for making these positions state of Alaska jobs. Is that still in the works?**

The Division of Behavioral Health does not provide direct client services. Therefore, peer support positions are and will become available with agencies that offer substance abuse and behavioral health support services.

### **Is it possible to offer a training inside a correctional institution to inmates?**

The ACBHC and DBH-Approved Peer Support trainers are working with the Department of Corrections to see if this can be arranged.

### **Will there be some help with the cost of certification?**





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The established certification fees are essential to allow the continued sustainability of ACBHC and the Peer Support Certification Program. To start, the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority and DBH provided one-time funds to defray or discount the cost of certification for the first 218 applicants. Discounts are available now through December 31, 2021 or for as long as funding remains available. Applicants may also access funds for certification from their individual organizations, the State of Alaska Department of Labor, the DOL Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and possibly also through Cook Inlet Tribal Council's Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program.

**Does the "Traditional Peer Support Professional" application process require the local federally recognized tribe to verify traditional knowledge?**

No. Traditional Peer Support Professional applications are available for all "indigenous" applicants.