

MEDI-CAL PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST CORE COMPETENCIES

1. The concepts of hope, recovery, and wellness.
2. The role of advocacy.
3. The role of consumers and family members
4. Psychiatric rehabilitation skills and service delivery, and addiction recovery principles, including defined practices.
5. Cultural and structural competence trainings.
6. Trauma-informed care.
7. Group facilitation skills.
8. Self-awareness and self-care.
9. Co-occurring disorders of mental health and substance use.
10. Conflict resolution.
11. Professional boundaries and ethics.
12. Preparation for employment opportunities, including study and test-taking skills, application and résumé preparation, interviewing, and other potential requirements for employment.
13. Safety and crisis planning.
14. Navigation of, and referral to, other services.
15. Documentation skills and standards.
16. Confidentiality.
17. Digital literacy.

EIGHT DIMENSIONS

The exam is designed to measure a candidate's competency in the following eight areas:

- **Administration Responsibilities**

Examples of information: Ability to keep health records, adhere to professional standards, maintain confidentiality, collaborate with others, and have basic computer skills.

- **Behavioral Health Foundations**

Examples of information: Knowledge of mental health and substance use disorders and their associated treatments and recovery approaches, Knowledge of Peer recovery approaches and techniques to support recovery and well-being.

- **Interpersonal Skills**

Examples of information: Active listening, empathy, self-disclosure about lived experience, resilience, self-awareness, self-care, cultural awareness, trust, and mutual respect.

- **Recovery Support**

Examples of information: Knowledge of traditional behavioral health support and harm reduction models, recognition of differences between the peer support worker role and clinical provider role, person-centered destigmatizing language, coaching, effective coping strategies.

- **Advocacy**

Examples of information: Promotion of self-advocacy, empowerment skills, stigma, formal channels for advocacy.

- **Community Inclusion**

Examples of information: Encouraging engagement with social networks and building and strengthening social skills, serving as a liaison, empowerment in community-based activities.

- **Resource Linkage**

Examples of information: Assist in accessing community services and resources, visit/explore community resources, identify and secure resources related to treatment, recovery, and wellness.

- **Crisis Management**

Examples of information: Ability to identify helpful resources, develop strategy for planning/managing behavioral health crises, identify signs of behavioral health crises, engage in supportive response skills and encouragement.

FIELD EXAMPLES OF THE 17 COMPETENCIES

1. Concepts of hope, recovery, and wellness

- Apply the principles of individual choice and self-determination.
- Promote the development of recovery plans.
- Model acceptance and cultural humility.
- Model wellness for individuals in recovery by maintaining one's own personal wellness.
- Promote social learning through shared experiences.
- Create a sense of community and connection.
- Effectively and appropriately share relevant parts of your own recovery story, and, with permission, other stories of recovery to convey and inspire hope that recovery is possible in a manner that keeps the focus on the individual receiving services, not the peer specialist.
- Know the difference between an illness story and a recovery story.
- Discuss ongoing personal efforts to enhance health, wellness and recovery.
- Communicate genuine emotion.
- Recognize and use person-centered language.
- Promote the potential for recovery to transform lives.
- Assist individuals to develop decision making strategies and function as an active member of their own recovery team, to include the selection of traditional and nontraditional recovery strategies, supports, and providers.
- Assist individuals to identify and take actions necessary to develop behaviors that support achievement of their whole health goals.
- Help individuals learn how to access and navigate formal and informal community resources and services.

- Help individuals anticipate and avert or safely manage any re-experience of symptoms of their condition(s) to ensure continued wellness.
- Help individuals to respond to any setbacks on their recovery journey as an opportunity for learning additional techniques or strategies to achieve and maintain their whole health goals.
- Provide access to a range of activation and self-care tools and resources that individuals may find useful in achieving their whole health goals.
- Use questions to help individuals get in touch with the life they want.
- Use individuals' dissatisfaction as an avenue to setting recovery goals.
- Demonstrate non-judgmental behavior.
- Use active listening skills.
- Use empathic listening skills.
- Ask open-ended questions that connect individuals to their inner wisdom.
- Share personal stories appropriately.
- Articulate what has been helpful and what has not been helpful in their own recovery.

2. The Role of Advocacy

- Teach individuals the skills needed to self-advocate.
- Assure that individuals know their rights and responsibilities.
- Model how to self-advocate.
- Explain importance of self-advocacy to individuals as a component of recovery/wellness.
- Differentiate between the levels of advocacy.
- Teach individuals effective communication skills with staff and doctors regarding treatment in both their medical and mental health needs.
- Encourage individuals to make their own choices rather than letting others decide for them.
- Encourage individuals to advocate for their needs and desires in treatment team meetings, community services, living situations, and with family.
- Educate colleagues about the process of recovery and the use of recovery support services.
- Advocate within systems to promote person-centered recovery/wellness support services.
- Participate in efforts to eliminate prejudice and discrimination towards people who have behavioral health conditions and their families.
- Teach stigma and effective stigma reduction strategies and how to counter self-stigma.
- Role model recovery and valuing the lived experience.

3. The role of consumers and family members

- Participates in efforts to eliminate prejudice and discrimination of people who have behavioral health challenges and their families.
- Educates colleagues about the process of recovery and the use of recovery support services.
- Actively participates in efforts to improve the organization.
- Promote self-determination and person-centered services when communicating with other members of the individual's care team.

- Help individuals develop self-advocacy skills.
- Advocate for multiple pathways to recovery/wellness
- Teach the skills needed to self-advocate.

4. Psychiatric rehabilitation skills and service delivery, and addiction recovery principles, including defined practices.

- Relay coping skills, positive attitude skills and self- esteem building strategies.
- Help individuals identify beliefs and values that build on their recovery as well as those that work against their recovery.
- Facilitate an individual's recognition of behaviors that are consistent with progress towards recovery
- Use questions to help individuals get in touch with the life they want.
- Use an individual's dissatisfaction as an avenue to identify recovery goals.
- Use questions to help individuals identify and move through their fears.
- Support the development of healthy behavior that is based on choice.
- Support the development of problem-solving skills.
- Apply principles of empowerment.
- Assist the individual with setting goals.
- Utilize Harm Reduction strategies.
- Contribute to the individual's recovery/wellness team(s).
- Assist the individual to identify and build on their strengths and resiliencies.
- Apply effective coaching techniques such as Motivational Interviewing.
- Practice a strengths-based approach to recovery/wellness.
- Use adult learning techniques to support individuals in acquiring life skills.
- Participate as an active member of the individual's treatment team(s).
- Assure that all recovery-oriented tasks and activities build on the individual's strengths and resiliencies.
- Support the individual to identify options and participate in all decisions related to establishing and achieving recovery goals.
- Assist the individual to develop problem-solving skills.
- Promote the individual's use of self-determination in recovery.
- Apply Motivational Interviewing skills to assist individuals in various stages of change.
- Support the individual in identifying their current stage of change.
- Partner with individuals to assist them in identifying their strengths, resiliencies, and challenges to recovery.
- Inform individuals of their options regarding decisions that affect their recovery.
- Educate on Recovery Management skills.
- Educate peers on Addiction and the Stages of Recovery, Brain Chemistry and Pharmacology.
- Address Co-Occurring Disorders at the same time.
- Educate on Lapse/Relapse Prevention skills.
- Educate on, support, and coach the acquisition and exercise of skills needed for symptom management, e.g., stress management, relaxation, communication, assertiveness, refusal skills, and coping skills, and attributes needed to attain and maintain long-term, stable employment and housing,

- Educate on core principles of recovery and resiliency to increase knowledge and skills needed to live well per their definition of recovery.
- Build trust and create mutual responsibility to create healing relationships.
- Educate on how to overcome negative self-talk; noticing patterns and replacing negative statements about oneself, using mindfulness to gain self-confidence and relieve stress.
- Help individuals build resilience.
- Utilize Culturally & Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Standards; creating a safe and supportive environment.
- Keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to recovery, and openly share this knowledge with their colleagues.

5. Cultural and structural competence trainings.

- Advocate for multiple pathways to recovery/wellness.
- Be able to help people express and utilize positive aspects of their cultural identity to promote recovery.
- Use person-centered language.
- Certified Peer Support Specialists will not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate in any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical disability, or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition or state.
- Assure that interpersonal relationships, services and supports, reflect individual differences and cultural diversity.
- Be able to interact sensitively and effectively with people of other cultures.
- Attend trainings on cultural competence and structural racism that highlight the impacts they have on health outcomes for people of color.
- Attend trainings on identifying Implicit Bias.

Field Examples: 6. Trauma-informed care

- Utilize principles of trauma-informed practices and their application in peer services that support recovery.
- Support the development of healthy behavior that is based on choice.
- Use patience and compassion in all interactions.
- Teach coping skills of mindfulness, stress reduction, anxiety management, and relaxation techniques.
- Be non-judgmental.
- Report suspicions of abuse or neglect to appropriate authority.

Field Examples: 7. Group facilitation skills.

- Apply basic group facilitation techniques. Practice effective communication skills. Be non-judgmental.
- Support the development of healthy behavior that is based on choice.
- Apply instructional strategies and materials that reflect the needs of the target audience.
- Facilitate the entry of new members and the transition of exiting members.

- Facilitate group growth within the established ground rules by using methods consistent with group type.
- Describe and summarize individual behavior within the group to document individual progress and identify needs and issues that may require further assistance.

8. Self-awareness and self-care.

- Practice personal safety and self-care.
- Practice a strengths-based approach to recovery/wellness.
- Communicate to support network personal challenges that impact ability to perform job duties.
- Respond to any setbacks on their recovery journey as an opportunity for learning additional techniques or strategies to achieve and maintain their whole health goals.

9. Co-occurring disorders of mental health and substance use.

- Peer counseling.
- Help individuals set recovery goals.
- Support peers to be part of recovery groups and communities to stay active and around others in recovery when not in contact with a Peer Supporter or engaged in treatment.
- Promote the potential for recovery to transform lives.

10. Conflict resolution.

- Be able to personally deal with conflict and difficult interpersonal relations in the workplace.
- Resolve conflicts in relationships with peers and others in their support network.
- Utilize de-escalation techniques.
- Communicate to support network personal issues that impact ability to perform job duties.
- Use organizational / departmental chain of command to address or resolve issues.
- Practice non-judgmental behavior.

11. Professional boundaries and ethics.

- Certified Peer Specialists will maintain high standards of personal conduct.
- Certified Peer Specialists will conduct themselves in a manner that fosters their own recovery.
- Certified Peer Specialists will respect the privacy and confidentiality of those they serve.
- Certified Peer Specialists will not enter into dual relationships or commitments that conflict with the interests of those they serve.
- Certified Peer Specialists will never engage in sexual/intimate activities with the consumers they serve.
- Certified Peer Specialists will not use unprescribed or illegal substances under any circumstance.
- Certified Peer Specialists will not accept gifts of significant value from those they serve.
- Certified Peer Specialists recognize and maintain professional and personal boundaries.
- Certified Peer Specialists will establish and maintain peer relationships rather than hierarchical relationships.

- Certified Peer Specialists demonstrate respect and non-judgmental attitudes toward clients in all contacts with community professionals and agencies.
- Certified Peer Specialists maintain confidentiality of client information in written and oral communications in accordance with code of conduct and government statutes.
- Certified Peer Specialists will never intimidate, threaten, harass, use undue influence, physical force or verbal abuse, or make unwarranted promises of benefits to the individuals they serve.
- Certified Peer Specialists use a range of supervisory options to process personal feelings and concerns about clients.
- Certified Peer Specialists communicate personal issues that negatively impact their ability to perform job duties and utilize supervision and consultation regarding dual/complex relationships.
- Comply with professional code of conduct in accordance with code of conduct and government statutes.

12. Preparation for employment opportunities, including study and test-taking skills, application and résumé preparation, interviewing, and other potential requirements for employment.

- Learn employment skills such as study and test-taking skills, application and résumé preparation, interviewing, and other potential requirements for employment.
- Utilize employment development resources such as job centers, community colleges, and others.
- Teach, coach, and model the skills and attributes needed to attain and maintain long-term, stable employment and housing.

13. Safety and crisis planning.

- Provide reassurance to peers in distress.
- Demonstrate consistency by supporting individuals during ordinary and extraordinary times.
- Assess individuals for behavior that may result in harm to self or others.
- Respond appropriately to risk indicators to assure welfare and physical safety.
- Identify indicators that individuals may be re-experiencing symptoms of their condition(s) and provide early intervention strategies to avert crisis and/or the need for intensive services.
- Take action to address distress or a crisis using knowledge of local resources, treatment, services and support preferences of peers.
- Assist individuals to develop and activate self-management plans, advanced directives, recovery prevention strategies, and crisis prevention strategies.
- Plan continuing care, relapse prevention, and discharge planning with client, family, and significant others.
- Use organizational / departmental chain of command to address or resolve issues.
- Immediately report suspicions if abuse or neglect are suspected.

14. Navigation of, and referral to, other services.

- Support individuals to use decision-making strategies when choosing services and supports.
- Help individuals to function as members of their treatment/recovery support teams.
- Research and identify credible information and options from various resources.
- Adhere to responsibilities and limits of the Peer Support Specialist role.
- Assist individuals in identifying support systems.
- Make referrals to and placements with other professionals, agencies, community programs, or other resources to meet individuals' needs.
- Provide warm hand-offs to referred agencies and explain the necessity for the referrals so individuals understand and follow through.
- Exchange relevant information with the agency or professional to whom the referral is being made in a manner consistent with confidentiality rules and regulations and generally accepted professional standards of care.
- Evaluate outcomes of services received from referrals to determine need for change of referral services.

15. Documentation skills and standards.

- Document information as required by program policies and procedures for billing and treatment purposes.
- Evaluate individual satisfaction with their progress toward recovery/wellness goals.
- Document Peer progress in relation to treatment goals and objectives, e.g., identify needs and issues that may require greater assistance.
- Document service coordination activities throughout the continuum of care consistent with Federal, California State, agency, and treatment program standards, rules, and regulations.
- Communicate Peer rights and responsibilities.

16. Confidentiality

- Maintain confidentiality in accordance with state and federal laws.
- Inform and explain to individuals confidentiality rights, program procedures that safeguard them, and the exceptions imposed by regulations.
- Exchange relevant information with the agency or professional to whom referrals are being made in a manner consistent with confidentiality rules and regulations and generally accepted professional standards of care.

17. Digital literacy

- Use online and virtual tools to provide access to a range of activation and self-care tools and resources that the individual may find useful in achieving their whole health goals.
- Apply appropriate technologies to deliver education, training, technical assistance and other information.
- Maintain familiarity with computer applications such as Microsoft Office Suite and Adobe Acrobat to develop recovery-focused resources for peers
- Maintain familiarity with online video conferencing platforms such as Zoom or WebEx to be prepared in the event of needed virtual services.

- Share digital privacy protections to individuals in order to protect health information and confidential conversations.
- Create online support groups.
- Effectively use technology to engage and provide peer support services to individuals living in rural or remote settings or experiencing other barriers to traditional “face-to-face” interaction.

EXAMINATION INFORMATION

The Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Exam is a 120-item multiple-choice test. Candidates will have 2.5 hours to complete the exam.

All examination questions are written in a multiple-choice format with four (4) response options. One of these options represents the BEST response and credit is granted only for selection of this response.

The Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Exam is composed of three types of questions: A) understand/recall, B) apply, and C) analyze. The understand/recall questions are considered less rigorous items requiring foundational knowledge of terminology, definitions, and basic concepts. These questions will take less time to read through and answer since they are less mentally taxing. Application and analysis questions are written at a more complex level to assess skill and mastery of Peer Support job activities and responsibilities. More cognitively complex questions, such as application and analysis, require some critical thinking and problem-solving. Therefore, they will take more time to read through and answer. The breakdown of the question types are as follows:

Understand/recall questions: These questions contain only one (1) sentence.

Example: What is a Peer Support Specialist?

Apply questions: These questions contain one sentence that provides context and then the question. So, there are two (2) sentences total in this type of exam question.

Example: A consumer¹ tells a Peer Support Specialist they want to make friends but does not know how. What action would the Peer Support Specialist take to support the consumer?

Analyze questions: These questions contain two sentences that provide background information and then the question. So, there are three (3) sentences total in this type of exam question.

Example: A consumer mentions a topic that is unfamiliar to the Peer Support Specialist. The Peer Support Specialist asks their team members for clarity on the topic, but the team members are also unfamiliar with the topic. What is the next action the Peer Support Specialist would take?