Best Practice Guidelines for Employing Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists

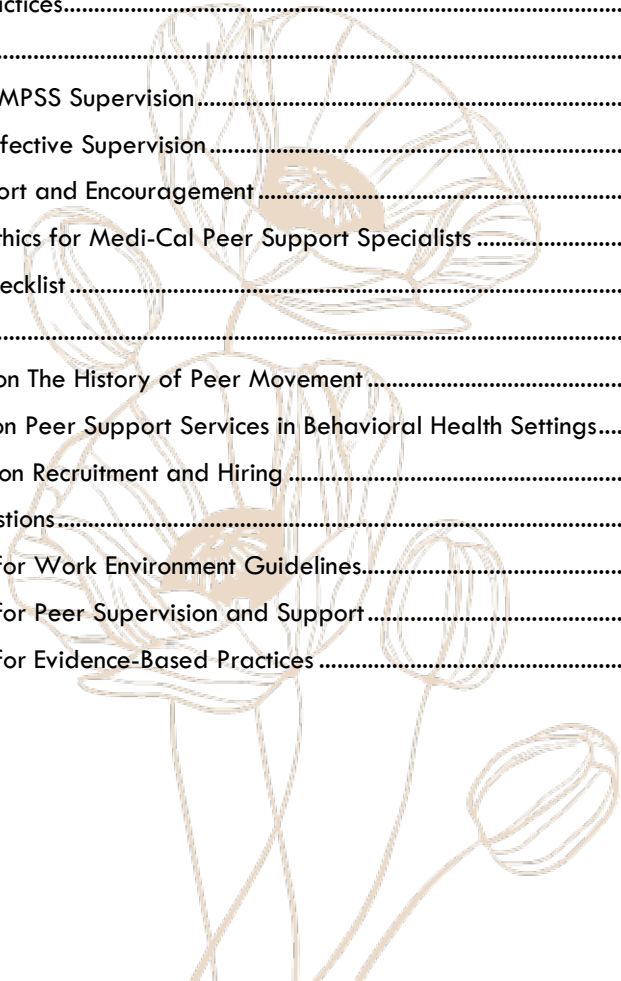# Best Practice Guidelines for Employing Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists

Contents

1. Introduction

Purpose

The peer movement has a long and rich history in California and has played a pivotal role in shaping the state's mental health and substance use disorder services. In recent years, California has taken steps to integrate peer support services into the broader healthcare system, recognizing the valuable role that peer workers can play in improving outcomes for individuals with mental health and substance use disorders. The peer movement in California has been led by a diverse coalition of individuals and organizations, including consumer-run advocacy groups, peer-run service providers, and academic institutions. Through their collective efforts, they have helped to shift the landscape of mental health and substance use disorder treatment in California and beyond, making peer support an increasingly recognized and valued aspect of care.

The content of this document serves a vital purpose in preparing workplaces to effectively employ state Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) in California. Our mission extends beyond recruitment and covers creating an environment where these professionals are seamlessly integrated and warmly embraced by other clinical workers. We aim to ensure that workplaces not only understand the value of peer work but also grasp its benefits and are well-equipped to employ, develop, and maximize the potential of Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS). By offering practical tips and strategies, we strive to foster a harmonious and productive work environment that optimizes the unique contributions of CMPSS work.

Acknowledgements

We wish to express our sincere gratitude and deep appreciation to the CalMHSA Medi-Cal Peer Certification Stakeholder Advisory Council, in collaboration with CalMHSA, for generously dedicating their time and sharing their expertise in shaping this guide. Their steadfast commitment to streamlining the integration of Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) into behavioral health services is truly commendable. Their efforts stand as a testament to their unwavering dedication to ensuring that CMPSS are accorded the respect, recognition, and professional status they rightfully deserve. We are profoundly grateful for their invaluable input.

Intended Audience

This guide is tailored for workplaces within California that are in the process of incorporating Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) or working towards certifying their current peer support specialist employees under the state's new certification. Its purpose is to inspire awareness and understanding of the role's scope and historical context in the peer movement. Additionally, it provides guidance for workplace managers, assisting them in reviewing, adapting, or creating policies that ensure equitable recruitment and hiring, establish an inclusive environment for peer employees, provide comprehensive training and professional development, and implement effective supervision and support structures for this newly certified role."

History of Peer movement

Welcome to the introductory glimpse into the rich history of the Peer Movement, a significant facet of mental health and substance use disorder support. Recognizing the roots and evolution of this movement is not only valuable for peer workers but also holds importance for workplaces that employ them, including managers and direct peer supervisors. In this section, we will briefly touch upon key milestones in the Peer Movement's history, with a range of historical phases that can be explored and taught in greater depth. Our hope is to inspire workplaces to delve deeper in the inclusion of this history in employee education, even if in a concise format. By

Our Goal

We aim to ensure that workplaces not only understand the value of peer work but also grasp its benefits and are well-equipped to employ, develop, and maximize the potential of Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS).

- CalMHSA Medi-Cal Peer Certification Stakeholder Advisory Council

understanding this foundation, employees can better appreciate the profound impact of peer support within the behavioral health landscape.

- ► Peer Support Roots: The Peer Movement traces its roots back to the Consumer/Survivor Movement, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. This movement was led by individuals who had survived the abuses of psychiatric hospitals, had experienced mental health challenges, and sought to challenge traditional mental health systems that often marginalized and disempowered those with lived experience.
- ► Deinstitutionalization: The movement gained momentum during the era of deinstitutionalization when psychiatric institutions began to close, and people with mental health conditions were transitioning to community-based care. This transition highlighted the need for community support and the recognition of individuals' strengths and resilience.
- ► Emergence of Peer Support Programs: In the 1980s and 1990s, formalized peer support programs began to take shape. These programs were based on the principles of shared experience, empathy, and mutual support. Peer supporters, often called peer specialists or peer counselors, were individuals who had experienced mental health challenges themselves and received specialized training to assist others on their recovery journeys.
- ► The Role of Consumer-Operated Services: Consumer-operated services (COS) or peer-run organizations played a crucial role in the Peer Movement's development. These organizations, often run and staffed by individuals with lived experience, provided a safe space for peers to connect, share experiences, and access peer support services.
- ► Research and Recognition: As the Peer Movement continued to grow, research began to highlight the effectiveness of peer support in improving outcomes for individuals with mental health and substance use challenges. Studies demonstrated that peer support interventions led to reduced hospitalizations, increased engagement in treatment, and enhanced overall well-being.
- ► Integration into Mental Health Systems: Over time, peer support services gained recognition as an essential component of mental health systems. Many states and countries incorporated peer support programs into their public mental health services, recognizing the unique value peers bring to the recovery process.
- ► Expansion to Substance Use Recovery: While initially focused on mental health, the Peer Movement extended its principles and approaches to substance use recovery. Peers with lived experience of substance use disorders started to offer support, understanding, and hope to others seeking recovery from addiction.
- ► Global Impact and International Networks: The Peer Movement has had a global impact, with peer support programs emerging in various countries. International networks and organizations, such as the International Association of Peer Supporters (iNAPS), have been established to promote the advancement of peer support worldwide.
- ► Continued Advocacy and Evolution: The Peer Movement continues to evolve, with peers advocating for improved mental health policies, reduced stigma, and increased access to support services. As the movement progresses, it seeks to address emerging challenges and remain inclusive and responsive to the needs of diverse communities.

For Resources see [Appendix A - Resources on The History of Peer Movement](#)

2. Overview of Peer Support Specialists in Behavioral Health Settings

Welcome to the exploration of the invaluable role of Peer Support Specialist within behavioral health settings. In this section, we will delve into the multifaceted value that Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) bring to the field, emphasizing the diverse benefits they offer to individuals and organizations alike. We will also examine the pivotal roles and responsibilities shouldered by CMPSS, shedding light on the unique insights and connections they provide to those they serve. Furthermore, we will explore best practices concerning qualifications and training, ensuring that CMPSS workers are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to make a profound and positive impact on the lives of those they support. This section aims to underscore the significance of CMPSS in behavioral health while providing guidance on how to optimize their contributions.

For resources on Peer Support Services in behavioral health settings, see Appendix B.

Value of Peer Support Specialists

Benefits and Impact: Peer work in public behavioral health settings offers several benefits and has a positive impact on individuals, service systems, and communities, including:

a) <u>Improved Outcomes</u>: Peer support has been shown to contribute to improved mental health and substance use treatment outcomes. It enhances engagement, reduces hospitalization rates, and increases individuals' overall satisfaction with their care.

b) <u>Increased Hope and Empowerment:</u> CMPSS workers serve as role models and provide hope for individuals by demonstrating that recovery is possible. Their presence fosters a culture of empowerment and engagement, where individuals feel valued and invested in the organization's success. They empower individuals to take an active role in their own recovery and make informed decisions about their treatment.

c) <u>Enhanced System Transformation</u>: CMPSS workers contribute to the transformation of traditional mental health systems by promoting recovery-oriented approaches, person-centered care, and the involvement of individuals with lived experience in service planning and delivery.

d) <u>Reduction of Stigma</u>: Peer Support Specialists play a crucial role in reducing stigma associated with mental health and substance use challenges. Their personal stories and lived experiences help challenge stereotypes and misconceptions.

e) <u>Improved Engagement and Retention</u>: CMPSS professionals excel at connecting with individuals experiencing mental health or substance use disorders, utilizing their own lived experiences to establish trust and rapport. This fosters greater comfort and engagement in the treatment process, resulting in higher retention rates and improved outcomes.

f) <u>Enhanced Cultural Competence</u>: With diverse backgrounds, CMPSS workers bring valuable cultural insights and knowledge to the table. They can address the cultural and social factors influencing mental health or substance use, ensuring treatment meets individual needs effectively.

Peer Worker Role and Responsibilities: Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) in public behavioral health settings have diverse roles and responsibilities, including:

a) <u>Peer Support</u>: CMPSS provides one-on-one or group support to individuals receiving mental health or substance use services. This support can include sharing their own recovery journey, offering practical advice, and promoting self-empowerment.

Reduction of Stigma

Peer Support Specialists play a crucial role in reducing stigma associated with mental health and substance use challenges. Their personal stories and lived experiences help challenge stereotypes and misconceptions.

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b) <u>Advocacy</u>: CMPSS workers advocate for the rights and needs of individuals with mental health or substance use challenges. They work to reduce stigma, improve access to services, and influence policies and practices that affect the recovery journey.

c) <u>Education and Outreach</u>: CMPSS workers engage in community education and outreach activities to raise awareness about mental health and substance use issues, promote recovery-oriented approaches, and provide information about available resources.

d) <u>Resource Navigation</u>: CMPSS assists individuals in navigating the complex behavioral health system by connecting them with appropriate services, resources, and community supports.

To learn more about the role that Peer Support Specialists play in recovery and value of peer support, see Appendix B - Resources on Peer Support Services in Behavioral Health Settings

State Qualifications and Training

A Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist (CMPSS) is a crucial member of the mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) support team who possesses unique qualifications. This combination of personal experience and dedication enables them to connect with individuals seeking support on a deeply empathetic level, providing invaluable guidance and inspiration along the path to recovery.

To qualify for this role, applicants or workers must meet these state qualifications:

a) Be at least 18 years old
b) Possess a high school diploma or equivalent degree
c) Be self-identified as having experience with the process of recovery from a mental illness or substance use disorder, either as a consumer of these services or as the parent, caregiver, or family member of a consumer.
d) Be willing to share their experience
e) Have a strong dedication to recovery, highlighting the power of resilience and personal growth in their own life
f) Pass the state exam to become Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist (CMPSS)

Basic training for Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) is essential to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to perform their role, enabling them to provide quality care to those they serve.

Training should at minimum encompass the following:

a) Comprehensive understanding of the 17 core competencies for CMPSS
b) A deep familiarity with the CMPSS Code of Ethics, emphasizing that it should not only be well known but also wholeheartedly agreed to and lived by. This commitment ensures ethical practices and confidentiality are maintained.
c) Training in appropriate sharing, ensuring they maintain a balance between personal experience and professional boundaries.
d) Preparation to pass the CMPSS Certification exam to validate their competence in the field.

Examples of <u>additional</u> training opportunities for CMPSS's are listed under Training and Professional Development

Unique Challenges

In this guideline section, we will explore the challenges and solutions surrounding the integration of Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) in behavioral health settings. We will cover key areas such as workforce integration, funding sustainability, role clarity and boundaries, and the importance of evaluation and research. By addressing these topics, we aim to provide practical advice for making the integration process smoother and more effective in these critical settings.

Workforce Integration challenge: Integrating Certified Medical Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) workers into existing professional hierarchies and clinical structures can be challenging. Building collaborative relationships and ensuring equal participation in decision-making processes are important for successful integration.

Practical solutions include:

a) <u>Clear Role Definition and Expectations</u>: Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of CMPSS within the organization. This helps both peers and other staff understand the contributions and limitations of each role.

b) <u>Training and Education:</u> Provide training for all staff, including supervisors, about the value of CMPSS work, their unique perspectives, and the role they play in the team. This can foster a greater understanding and appreciation of their contributions.

c) <u>Regular Team Meetings</u>: Hold regular team meetings that include CMPSS attendance and participation. This creates a platform for open communication, idea sharing, and collaborative problem-solving.

d) <u>Supervisor Training</u>: Train supervisors on how to effectively manage teams that include CMPSS members. This includes providing guidance on communication, feedback, and addressing potential conflicts that might arise due to differing perspectives.

e) <u>Diverse Representation</u>: Aim for diverse representation in decision-making bodies, including CMPSS input. This can contribute to a more inclusive and balanced decision-making process.

f) <u>Recognition and Appreciation:</u> Recognize and appreciate the contributions of CMPSS workers in team settings. Highlight instances where their unique insights led to positive outcomes.

g) <u>Conflict Resolution</u>: Develop a clear process for addressing conflicts that might arise between CMPSS and other staff members. This process should prioritize open dialogue and understanding.

h) <u>Promote Mutual Learning</u>: Encourage learning opportunities where both CMPSS employees and traditional staff can share their expertise and learn from each other.

Funding and Sustainability challenges: Securing sustainable funding for CMPSS programs can be a challenge. Advocacy efforts are necessary to ensure that CMPSS employees are adequately compensated and that funding streams are available for training, supervision, and ongoing support. By taking proactive steps, managers can create a supportive environment within their workplace that prioritizes the sustainability of peer work programs and increases the likelihood of securing the necessary funding and resources.

Some ways to do this:

a) <u>Manager and Team Education</u>: Managers should thoroughly understand the value and impact of peer work programs. This includes being well-informed about the benefits, outcomes, and cost-effectiveness of such programs. They should also stay updated on current funding trends and opportunities in the field of mental health and peer support.

b) <u>Develop a Clear Business Case</u>: Work with their teams to create a compelling business case for the peer work program. This case should highlight the program's objectives, expected outcomes, potential cost savings, and its alignment with the organization's mission and goals. Having a well-defined business case is crucial when seeking funding or advocating for increased resources.

Integration Challenges

Integrating Certified Medical Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) workers into existing professional hierarchies and clinical structures can be challenging.

Building collaborative relationships and ensuring equal participation in decision-making processes are important for successful integration.

c) <u>Advocate Internally:</u> Managers should advocate for the importance of peer work programs within their organization. They can do this by presenting data and evidence of the program's effectiveness to senior leadership and decision-makers. Emphasize how peer support complements existing services and contributes to better client outcomes.

d) <u>Allocate Resources Wisely:</u> Ensure that existing resources are allocated efficiently within the organization to support peer work programs. This includes allocating funds for training, supervision, and ongoing support for CMPSS workers. Managers should also prioritize the program's sustainability when making budget decisions.

e) <u>Foster Collaboration:</u> Encourage collaboration and coordination between different departments and programs within the organization. Seek opportunities to integrate CMPSS support into existing services, which can help leverage resources and expand the program's reach.

f) <u>Measure and Communicate Impact:</u> Implement data collection and evaluation methods to measure the program's impact. Managers should regularly communicate the program's successes, including client testimonials and quantitative data, to stakeholders, donors, and/or funders.

Role Clarity and Boundaries challenges: Establishing clear role boundaries between CMPSS professionals and other clinical staff is crucial to avoid confusion and maintain professional ethics. By implementing strategies, organizations can foster an environment where role boundaries are well-defined, respected, and consistently upheld, promoting professionalism and ethical practice among all team members.

Some solution strategies may include:

a) <u>Training and Orientation:</u> Provide comprehensive training and orientation programs for all employees, including CMPSS staff, to clarify their roles, responsibilities, and boundaries. Ensure that all team members understand the scope of their roles and the roles of their colleagues.

b) <u>Written Job Descriptions:</u> Create detailed job descriptions for each position, including CMPSS role, outlining their specific duties and limitations. Clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of CMPSS workers in relation to other professionals.

c) <u>Regular Team Meetings:</u> Schedule regular team meetings where members can openly discuss their roles, share updates, and address any concerns regarding boundaries. Encourage open communication and collaboration while emphasizing the importance of respecting professional boundaries.

d) <u>Supervision and Oversight:</u> Implement a system of supervision or oversight for CMPSS employees, conducted by a supervisor or manager from within the organization. Supervisors can help ensure that CMPSS staff are operating within their defined boundaries and provide guidance when necessary.

e) <u>Conflict Resolution Protocols:</u> Develop clear protocols for handling conflicts or boundary violations in the workplace. Make sure all team members, including CMPSS workers, are aware of the steps to take when a boundary issue arises and how it will be resolved.

f) <u>Documentation and Reporting:</u> Encourage consistent documentation of interactions and interventions by all professionals, including CMPSS staff. Create a reporting mechanism for any concerns related to professional boundaries, and ensure confidentiality is maintained.

g) <u>Feedback and Evaluation:</u> Conduct regular performance evaluations for all professionals, including CMPSS employees, to assess their adherence to role boundaries and ethical standards. Use feedback as a basis for improvement, growth, and recognition.

h) <u>Promote Self-Awareness:</u> Encourage self-awareness among all team members, helping them recognize their strengths and limitations in their roles. Foster a culture of self-reflection and humility to prevent overstepping boundaries.

i) <u>External Consultation:</u> In complex cases or when role boundaries are particularly challenging, consider seeking external consultation from experts or other professional organizations or teams.

Evaluation and Research challenges: There is a need for continued evaluation and research to demonstrate the effectiveness and impact of peer work in public behavioral health settings. This evidence can further support the integration and expansion of Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist (CMPSS) programs.

Following are some approaches to facilitate assessment and gather necessary evidence to support the integration and expansion of CMPSS programs:

a) <u>Data Collection and Analysis</u>: Implement systematic data collection methods to track key metrics related to peer work programs, such as client outcomes, satisfaction, and engagement. Analyze data to identify trends, patterns, and areas where CMPSS workers have made a positive impact.

b) <u>Client Surveys and Feedback</u>: Administer regular surveys to clients who have received services from CMPSS workers to gather feedback on their experiences. Use qualitative and quantitative feedback to assess the perceived benefits of peer support and areas for improvement.

c) <u>Comparative Studies</u>: Conduct comparative studies that compare outcomes for clients who receive peer support with those who do not. Utilize control groups or matched samples to measure the specific impact of CMPSS workers on client well-being and recovery.

d) <u>Longitudinal Studies</u>: Undertake longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of peer support on clients' mental health and overall well-being. Follow up with clients at regular intervals to track changes over time.

e) <u>Cost-Benefit Analysis</u>: Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of peer work programs by comparing the costs of implementing and maintaining these programs with the benefits they generate in terms of reduced hospitalization rates, improved quality of life, and other relevant outcomes.

f) <u>Qualitative Research</u>: Conduct in-depth qualitative research, such as interviews and focus groups, with both clients and CMPSS workers. Explore the lived experiences and perspectives of those involved to gain a better understanding of the impact of peer support.

g) <u>Peer Worker Self-Reporting</u>: Encourage CMPSS employees to maintain journals or logs of their interactions and interventions with clients. This self-reporting can provide valuable insights into the types of support provided and the challenges faced.

h) <u>Collaborate with Research Institutions</u>: Partner with academic institutions or research organizations to conduct rigorous studies on the effectiveness of peer work in behavioral health settings. Seek external expertise to design and execute research projects.

i) <u>Continuous Quality Improvement</u>: Establish a culture of continuous improvement within CMPSS programs, using feedback and research findings to refine and enhance program delivery. Adapt strategies and interventions based on emerging evidence.

j) <u>Engage CMPSS Workers in Research</u>: Involve CMPSS workers themselves in the research process by seeking their input and participation in data collection, analysis, and program evaluation.

k) <u>Seek Funding for Research Initiatives</u>: Pursue grants and funding opportunities specifically aimed at supporting research on peer work effectiveness in behavioral health settings.

l) <u>Share Findings and Best Practices</u>: Disseminate research findings within the organization and to relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, funders, and the wider healthcare community. Highlight successful practices and innovations in peer support work.

3. Recruitment and Hiring

In this guide section, we offer practical ideas and best practices for recruiting and hiring Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) in behavioral health settings. From defining job requirements to conducting effective interviews, managing compensation, and promoting career growth, we provide concise insights to help organizations navigate this critical process.

Requirements and Qualifications

Explore valuable tips and insights on the requirements and qualifications to consider when hiring CMPSS workers for behavioral health settings.

a) <u>State Qualifications and Basic Training</u>: Ensure candidates meet state-specific requirements and have received fundamental training.

b) <u>Community Connection</u>: Look for candidates who have a strong connection to the community they will serve, showing cultural familiarity and identification with the population.

c) <u>Networking and Resource Knowledge</u>: Assess candidates' networking skills and knowledge of local resources that can benefit clients.

d) <u>Relevant Lived Experience</u>: Prioritize candidates with personal lived experience related to mental health or substance abuse, as this can enhance their empathy and understanding.

e) <u>Cultural and Linguistic Match</u>: Seek candidates who share similar cultural or linguistic qualities with the community with which they will work.

f) <u>Ethical Role Modeling</u>: Expect candidates to embody the code of ethics relevant to their roles.

g) <u>Commitment to Learning</u>: Consider candidates' willingness to continuously learn and stay updated on best practices.

h) <u>Effective Communication</u>: Assess candidates' communication skills, including their ability to establish healthy boundaries and build rapport with clients.

In the initial stages of screening, consider removing personal information (name, gender, age) from resumes to ensure that candidates are evaluated solely on their qualifications.

Recruitment

Explore the following best practices to effectively recruit CMPSS professionals, ensuring a strong and qualified workforce in healthcare settings.

a) <u>Targeted Advertisements</u>: Craft job advertisements with specific statements to attract candidates who meet the role's qualifications, such as those with lived experience as consumers of family members of consumers of mental health services, a requirement for self-disclosure as a former or current user or family member of behavioral/mental health services, and personal experience with recovery.

b) <u>Clear Job Descriptions</u>: Provide detailed job descriptions and qualifications that help candidates understand the criteria sought and gain insight into the peer support role. Sample job descriptions may include responsibilities like assisting peers with individual service plans, utilizing recovery-oriented tools, helping others develop self-directed wellness plans, and advocating for individuals' needs.

c) <u>Diverse Recruitment Channels</u>: Cast a wide net to seek out candidates by consulting Certifying Entity's Certification Registry for certified individuals, reaching out to peer-led organizations, requesting referrals from state departments, posting job openings on career websites, and disseminating announcements through state employment services.

- Optimize keyword searches to identify peer-led organizations in your area, using phrases such as "Peer-led organizations near me," "Peer Support Specialists," "Peer workers," "Recovery

coaches," "Peer specialists," and "Peer recovery workers." This enhances your ability to locate potential candidates within the peer support community.

d) For job definitions and designations, see Peer Services Toolkit under Appendix C – Resources on Recruitment and Hiring

Interviews and Selecting Candidates

Effective strategies for evaluating and mitigating discriminatory practices during the interview and hiring process.

a) Blind Resume Review: In the initial stages of screening, consider removing personal information (name, gender, age) from resumes to ensure that candidates are evaluated solely on their qualifications.

b) Review Interview Questions and Assessment Criteria: Examine interview questions and assessment criteria to ensure they are free from biases and do not discriminate against candidates based on their race, gender, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or other protected characteristics.

c) Standardize the Interview Process: Establish a standardized interview process with set questions and evaluation criteria that all interviewers must follow to maintain consistency and fairness.

d) Training and Education: Provide training to interviewers and hiring managers on unconscious bias and discrimination awareness. Educate them on the importance of fair and equitable hiring practices.

e) Diverse Interview Panels: Form diverse interview panels that include individuals from various backgrounds and perspectives to minimize biases in the selection process. When coordinating the selection committee, consider having at least 1-2 peer providers, the peer provider supervisor, and/or anyone who will be mentoring the new peer provider. This will allow for having a well-rounded interview committee.

f) Structured Interviews: Use structured interviews where candidates are asked the same set of questions in the same order. This helps eliminate bias and allows for more objective assessments.

g) Avoid Personal Questions: In interviews, refrain from asking personal questions unrelated to the job. Focus on assessing candidates' qualifications, skills, and experiences relevant to the position. To ensure that candidates are still able to demonstrate the ability to disclose appropriately without asking personal questions:

   a. Focus on Relevance: During the interview, ensure that any questions related to self-disclosure are directly tied to the requirements of the job. For example, you can inquire about a candidate's comfort level with self-disclosure and their understanding of when and how it might be appropriate in a peer support context.

   b. Provide Scenarios: Instead of asking personal questions outright, present hypothetical scenarios or case studies that require candidates to demonstrate their understanding of when and how self-disclosure may be beneficial to support peers.

   c. Role Play: Consider conducting role-play exercises during the interview to assess how candidates handle self-disclosure in different scenarios, emphasizing their ability to do so respectfully and professionally.

h) Sample Interview Questions

   a. For sample interview questions and resources on interviewing see Appendix C – Sample Interview Questions

Selecting final candidate

Discover strategies to ensure the best fit as you navigate the process of selecting the final candidate for a CMPSS position.

a) Skills and Qualifications Assessment: Review each candidate's skills, qualifications, and relevant experience. Compare their backgrounds to the specific requirements of the job.

b) Interview Panel Consensus: After each interview, hold discussions to reach a consensus on the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate.

c) <u>Reference Checks</u>: Conduct thorough reference checks to verify the candidate's work history, performance, and suitability for the role. Contact previous supervisors, colleagues, or mentors if possible.

d) <u>Cultural Fit</u>: Consider the candidate's alignment with the organization's culture, values, and mission. Assess whether they will be a good fit within the existing team.

e) <u>Consider Diversity and Inclusion</u>: Ensure diversity and inclusion are considered during the selection process. Strive for a workforce that reflects the diversity of the populations you serve.

f) <u>Final Interview or Assessment:</u> For the top candidates, consider a final interview, presentation, or task to evaluate their skills and readiness for the role. This can help differentiate among closely matched candidates.

> STRIVE FOR A WORKFORCE THAT REFLECTS THE DIVERSITY OF THE POPULATIONS YOU SERVE.

Compensation and Benefits

Approaches to ensure fair compensation and benefits for Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS)

a) <u>Market Analysis</u>: Conduct regular market analyses to understand the prevailing wages and benefit packages for CMPSS jobs in different regions of California. This information can serve as a benchmark for setting fair compensation and benefits.

b) <u>Advocacy and Collaboration</u>: Collaborate with peer worker associations, unions, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders to advocate for fair wages and benefits at both the state and local levels. Collective efforts can exert influence and drive positive change.

c) <u>Equity Assessments</u>: Regularly assess your organization's compensation and benefits policies for CMPSS workers to identify any disparities based on gender, race, or other factors. Make necessary adjustments to ensure equity.

d) <u>Benchmarking</u>: Compare your organization's compensation and benefits packages with those offered by similar employers in the region. Ensure that your packages are competitive to attract and retain talent.

e) <u>Cost of Living Adjustments</u>: Consider implementing cost of living adjustments (COLA) to account for the higher living expenses in certain California regions. This helps maintain fair compensation relative to the local economy.

f) <u>Benefits Package</u>: Provide a comprehensive benefits package that includes health insurance, retirement plans, paid time off, and other benefits that contribute to the overall well-being of CMPS employees.

g) <u>Transparency</u>: Be transparent with CMPSS employees about how their compensation is determined, including factors like experience, qualifications, and performance evaluations. Transparency builds trust and ensures fairness.

h) <u>Professional Development</u>: Offer opportunities for CMPSS workers to enhance their skills and qualifications. Provide support for specializations or advanced training that can lead to increased compensation.

Offering Flexible Work Arrangements

Here are some work arrangements to consider that would be in support of promoting a work life balance that allows CMPSS employees to take care of their wellbeing and excel in their work.

- <u>Flextime</u>: Enable CMPSS employees to select their daily work hours within predefined limits, granting them more control over their schedules.
- <u>Compressed Work Hours</u>: Allow CMPSS to work longer hours on fewer days, potentially resulting in shorter workweeks.

- <u>Part-Time Work</u>: Provide the opportunity for CMPSS workers to work fewer hours per week while still maintaining their roles.
- <u>Job Sharing</u>: Allow CMPSS the option to share a full-time position with another qualified CMPSS, providing both individuals with the flexibility to balance work and personal commitments.
- <u>Shift Work</u>: Implement shift schedules to accommodate varying time preferences, including evening or weekend shifts.
- <u>Remote Work</u>: Allow CMPSS to work from their preferred location, providing flexibility in choosing their work environment.
- <u>Hybrid Workspace</u>: Offer a combination of remote work and on-site work, allowing CMPSS workers to split their time between locations.
- <u>Leaves and Sabbaticals</u>: Provide opportunities for extended leaves of absence or sabbaticals to support personal development, rest, or other life events.
- <u>Phased Retirement:</u> Support a gradual transition into retirement for CMPSS workers nearing the end of their careers, allowing them to reduce their hours gradually while mentoring newer employees.

Career Pathways

The following are a few examples to consider as potential career pathways for Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS)

- <u>Promotion</u>: Create senior role or CMPSS supervisor/manager roles to recognize and reward leadership skills and experience.
- <u>Compensation Increases</u>: Implement compensation structures that reflect years of prior and acquired experience, as well as mastery of skills and responsibilities within the role.
- <u>Specialization</u>: Offer opportunities for CMPSS to specialize in one or more of the four (4) areas of specialization in peer services or enhance their expertise in fields like working with youth or other demographics.
- <u>Research and Training</u>: Support CMPSS workers in roles related to research, curriculum development, or training, contributing to the advancement of peer support practices and the education of future peer workers.
- <u>Community Outreach and Advocacy</u>: Encourage CMPSS workers to take on roles focused on community outreach, advocacy, and policy development, becoming champions for behavioral health awareness and change.
- <u>Consulting and Coaching</u>: Enable experienced CMPSS workers to provide consulting services or coaching to individuals, organizations, or agencies seeking to implement effective peer support programs.
- <u>Lateral Transfers</u>: Allow CMPSS who have demonstrated competency in their current roles and choose not to pursue further education to explore lateral transfers to related positions.

For Resources, see <u>Appendix C – Resources on Recruitment and Hiring</u>

4. Establishing a Welcoming & Inclusive Workplace

In this section, we will dive into essential tips for creating a positive and efficient workplace among peers. We will focus on building an inviting and diverse peer group culture that encourages inclusivity. Additionally, we will discuss ways to enhance teamwork and set up systems for gathering valuable input on our shared policies and procedures. Our goal is to establish an environment where each peer's voice matters, is appreciated, and contributes to the collective success of our group.

> *Foster a workplace culture that values and embraces diversity, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and lived experience.*

Diversity and Inclusion in Integrated Peer Work Environments

In this section, we will explore fostering diversity and inclusion during the integration of Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS). We will cover diversifying hiring, inclusive policies, addressing discrimination, and proactive measures to create an inclusive workplace for all.

Achieving Diversity in Hiring

Intentionally seek and promote CMPSS workers from a wide range of backgrounds, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, education, socioeconomic status, and lived experience. Some practical to do this:

Targeted outreach

a) Collaborate with community organizations, advocacy groups, and educational institutions that serve diverse populations. Attend events, career fairs, and workshops targeting individuals from various backgrounds.
b) Develop outreach materials that emphasize your commitment to diversity and inclusion, which can attract candidates from underrepresented communities.
c) Establish partnerships with diverse organizations to create pipelines for recruiting peer workers from diverse backgrounds.
d) See Recruitment and Hiring for more on recruitment

Cultural Competency Training

e) Provide cultural competency training for all staff, including interviewers and hiring managers. This training should encompass an understanding of diverse cultural backgrounds, gender identities, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic statuses.
f) See Diverse Training under Combatting Discrimination and Harassment

Inclusive Job Posting and Policies

g) Craft job postings that use inclusive language and emphasize your commitment to diversity and inclusion. Highlight that candidates from all backgrounds are encouraged to apply.
h) Review and adjust your hiring policies to ensure they are free from bias and promote fairness in the selection process. Ensure that hiring decisions are based on qualifications and competencies rather than biases related to race, gender, orientation, or socioeconomic status.
i) See Recruitment and Hiring for more on inclusive postings and policies

Inclusive Policies and Practices

a) Updated Policies: Maintain current discrimination and harassment policies, conducting regular training to inform and ensure employee compliance.
b) Flex Work Communication: Effectively communicate the availability of flexible work arrangements to accommodate diverse needs. Implement safeguards to ensure that CMPSS workers are not negatively affected when requesting such accommodations.

c) <u>Empowering Career Growth</u>: Offer guidance for advancing pay and securing promotions, ensuring that CMPSS workers have access to information that fosters their professional development.
d) <u>Elevating Peer Work</u>: Implement annual education and training programs aimed at fostering a deep understanding and appreciation of peer work. Actively involve CMPSS workers in these initiatives to ensure their perspectives are valued.
e) <u>Incorporate Diverse Perspectives</u>: Integrate a variety of viewpoints, including those of CMPSS workers, into decision-making processes to enrich the organization's culture and decision outcomes.
f) <u>Facilitate Peer Learning</u>: Create shadowing opportunities for CMPSS workers, allowing them to learn and grow within their roles.

Combatting Discrimination and Harassment

Our approach to addressing discrimination and harassment encompasses essential elements such as education and training, the establishment of clear policies and procedures, and a strong commitment from the leadership team. Below, we outline some recommended best practices to ensure a safe and respectful work environment for all.

Diverse Training Options

Below, you will find an extensive list of diverse training options. For workplaces aiming to successfully integrate CMPSS workers, it is imperative to ensure they undergo some form of training. This commitment contributes to creating a more inclusive workplace, reducing discrimination, and fostering a culture of mutual respect in behavioral health.

a) <u>Diversity and Inclusion Training</u>: This training focuses on promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. It helps participants understand unconscious bias, privilege, and microaggressions, and offers strategies to create a more inclusive culture.
b) <u>Anti-Discrimination Training</u>: This program educates participants about various forms of discrimination, including race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability discrimination. It emphasizes legal responsibilities and ways to prevent discrimination.
c) <u>Harassment Prevention Training</u>: Harassment prevention training addresses sexual harassment, bullying, and other forms of workplace harassment. It helps participants recognize, prevent, and respond to harassment incidents appropriately.
d) <u>Cultural Competency Training</u>: Cultural competency training instructs participants about diverse cultural backgrounds, customs, and communication styles. It helps individuals become more sensitive and respectful when interacting with peers and clients from diverse backgrounds.
e) <u>Implicit Bias Training</u>: Implicit bias training focuses on recognizing and addressing unconscious biases that may affect decision-making, interactions, and perceptions of others. It offers strategies to mitigate these biases.
f) <u>Conflict Resolution and Mediation Training</u>: Conflict resolution and mediation training equip participants with skills to resolve conflicts and disputes effectively and respectfully. This can prevent situations from escalating into discrimination or harassment issues.
g) <u>Communication and Active Listening Workshops</u>: Effective communication and active listening workshops enhance participants' ability to communicate openly and empathetically, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflicts.
h) <u>Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Training</u>: This training educates participants about LGBTQ+ issues, terminology, and the challenges faced by individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. It fosters inclusivity and understanding.

i)   Mental Health and Wellness Training: Mental health and wellness training help individuals recognize signs of mental health issues, reduce stigma, and create a supportive environment for colleagues and clients with mental health challenges.

j)   Policy and Reporting Procedures Training: Training on organizational policies and reporting procedures for discrimination and harassment ensures that all employees, including management and CMPSS workers, are aware of how to report incidents and how they will be addressed.

k)   Role-Specific Training: Tailor training programs to address specific roles and responsibilities. For example, management may receive additional training on handling complaints and investigations, while CMPSS workers may focus on communication and support skills.

l)   Bystander Intervention Training: Bystander intervention training teaches participants how to safely and effectively intervene when they witness discriminatory or harassing behavior, promoting a culture of accountability.

Transparent Guidelines: Conduct, Protection, Reporting, and Resolution Procedures

a)   Accessible Reporting Procedures: Clearly outline the steps for reporting incidents of discrimination or harassment, including multiple reporting channels (e.g., HR, a designated supervisor, an anonymous hotline). Ensure that reporting procedures are easily accessible, confidential, and free from retaliation.

b)   Thorough Investigation and Resolution: Specify a structured process for investigating complaints, involving impartial individuals who are trained in conducting thorough investigations. Outline a timeline for resolution, including steps for corrective actions and follow-up measures to prevent future incidents.

c)   Regular Policy Communication: Emphasize the importance of regularly communicating the policy to all employees, providing training on recognizing and preventing discrimination and harassment, and promoting a culture of inclusivity and respect.

Cultivating Leadership Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

a)   Implement clear metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) related to diversity and inclusion goals.

b)   Hold leadership accountable for meeting these goals and regularly report progress to the executive team and board.

c)   Conduct feedback surveys to gather feedback from employees about their perceptions of leadership's commitment to anti-discrimination and harassment efforts.

d)   Encourage leaders to actively participate in diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as mentoring programs or employee resource groups.

e)   Recognize and reward leaders who consistently demonstrate inclusive behaviors and take a stand against discrimination and harassment.

Beyond Policies and Procedures: Welcoming and Celebrating Diversity for Peers

In this section, we explore strategies that go beyond policies and procedures to cultivate a truly inclusive workplace for peers. Discover how to create a warm, celebratory atmosphere that embraces differences, encourages cultural appreciation, and supports peer-led initiatives.

Some ideas to do this:

a) Implement non-judgmental approaches for diverse lived experiences by offering peer sensitivity training for clinical workers, creating a platform where peers can share their experiences, establish mentorship for CMPSS workers, and promote diversity in leadership.

b) Teach and model respectful and person-first language (including when and when not to use it). For People First Language and more, see Appendix D

c) Celebrate differences by recognizing cultural events, awareness months, and other occasions that promote understanding and appreciation of different lived experiences. These can be led by CMPSS workers and other non-management employees

d) Encourage and support Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) by recognizing them, providing resources, promoting ERG activities, and creating opportunities for mentorships and ERG networking

e) Facilitate employee events and social gatherings to foster bonding and networking opportunities among CMPSS and other clinical workers to enhance team building and camaraderie

Encouraging Team Collaboration and Communication

Team Building Activities

- Organize regular team-building exercises and activities to promote positive working relationships, trust, and camaraderie among CMPSS and other non-peer workers.
- Encourage participation in group discussions, workshops, and training sessions to enhance collaboration, problem-solving, and shared learning experiences

Effective Communication Channels

- Establish open and transparent lines of communication to encourage the sharing of ideas, concerns, and feedback.
- Utilize various communication tools and platforms, such as regular team meetings, email, instant messaging, and virtual collaboration platforms, to facilitate effective communication among team members.

Developing and Implementing Policies and Procedures that Support Peer Work

Peer Support Standards

- Develop clear and comprehensive policies and procedures that contain standards of practice for Peer Support Specialists, including scope of practice, Principles of Core Competencies, code of ethics, and best practices.

- Train and guide CMPSS workers on the process of implementing evidence-based practices by providing evidence-based and practice-based toolkits and resource information.
- Supply, deliver, and document ongoing peer worker training

Confidentiality and Privacy

- Establish firm policies and procedures regarding the protection of client confidentiality and privacy, ensuring all information shared by clients is managed with the utmost care and respect.
- Provide ongoing training to peer recovery specialists on maintaining confidentiality and complying with relevant privacy laws and regulations.

Supervisor Training for Managing of Peer Work

- Implement Supervisor training of CMPSS supervisors and non-peer workers to understand the value of peer support work
- Ensure supervisors become acquainted with the standards and tools of peer support role

Nothing about us without us. -Peer Workers

Creating a Feedback Mechanism for CMPSS Workers to Provide Input on Policies and Procedures

Peer Worker Advisory Group

- Form a team consisting of peer recovery specialists to serve as a platform for gathering feedback and input on policies, procedures, and other decisions.
- Provide a safe and confidential space for peer recovery specialists to express their opinions, suggestions, and concerns regarding organizational practices.

Regular Feedback Surveys

- Conduct anonymous surveys on a regular basis to gather feedback from peer recovery specialists on policies, procedures, and the overall work environment.
- Analyze survey results, identify areas for improvement, and take appropriate action to address concerns and suggestions raised by the peer recovery specialists

5. Training and Professional Development

Agencies must understand the significance of fostering a supportive and growth-oriented environment for the Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist (CMPSS). This section summary outlines the commitment to providing comprehensive training, both initial and ongoing, as well as supporting continuous education and professional development opportunities to empower CMPSS Workers in their roles.

Providing Initial and Ongoing Training

Comprehensive Training Program: We recognize the importance of equipping CMPSS Workers with the necessary skills and knowledge from the outset. Training programs may cover key areas such as:

f) <u>Peer Support Skills</u>: Training focuses on developing active listening abilities, empathy, effective communication, and building therapeutic relationships. A CMPSS worker can learn to create a safe and supportive environment for individuals seeking assistance.

g) <u>Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders:</u> Training ensures CMPSS workers gain a deep understanding of various mental health conditions, substance use disorders, and their impacts on individuals' well-being. They also receive education on trauma-informed care, crisis intervention, and suicide prevention.

h) <u>Ethical and Professional Guidelines</u>: Emphasize the importance of maintaining professional boundaries, confidentiality, and ethical behavior. CMPSS workers are trained to adhere to industry best practices, legal requirements, and organizational policies.

i) <u>Self-Care and Wellness</u>: Recognizing the emotional toll of this role by providing training on self-care strategies and stress management techniques. CMPSS workers learn to prioritize their well-being to prevent burnout and maintain their mental health.

j) <u>Agency-Specific Requirements</u>: These training sessions cover a wide range of topics, including but not limited to HR policies, regulations, orientation training, onboarding training, technical skills training, soft skills training, product/service training, compliance training, documentation, and billing. By actively participating in these training sessions, a CMPSS acquires the necessary knowledge and skills to excel in your roles while ensuring adherence to county regulations.

Ongoing Training Opportunities: To ensure continuous growth and development, a Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist may be offered a range of ongoing training opportunities, such as:

a) <u>Workshops and Seminars</u>: Regular workshops and seminars are conducted on various topics related to mental health, substance use, and peer support. These sessions focus on emerging trends, new interventions, and evidence-based practices.

b) <u>Webinars, Web Fairs and E-Learning</u>: Provide access to webinars and e-learning modules that enable CMPSS workers to enhance their knowledge and skills conveniently. These resources cover a wide range of relevant subjects and can be accessed at their own pace.

c) <u>Examples</u> of additional training opportunities for Peer Support Specialists:

- Advanced Peer Support Training
- Crisis Intervention Training
- Mental Health First Aid
- Motivational Interviewing
- Trauma-Informed Care
- Cultural Competency Training
- Self-Care and Burnout Prevention
- Recovery-Oriented Practices
- Conflict Resolution and Mediation
- Peer Leadership Training

Supporting Peer Worker Development

Supporting Continuing Education and Professional Development Opportunities

Prioritizing the growth and development of a Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist is fundamental. By supporting continuous education and professional development opportunities, we aim to empower them in their roles. The commitment to their growth not only benefits the individuals they support but also contributes to their personal and professional fulfillment. Explore these practical ways to create a nurturing environment that empowers your workers to continue learning and excel in their roles.

d) <u>Tuition Reimbursement</u>: Agencies may support the professional growth of CMPSS workers by offering financial assistance for higher education or certifications related to their field. This assistance encourages them to pursue further education and obtain additional qualifications to enhance their expertise.

e) <u>Mentorship Programs</u>: Facilitating mentorship opportunities to connect CMPSS workers with experienced professionals in the field. These relationships provide guidance, advice, and a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences, fostering their professional development.

f) <u>Professional Conferences and Networking</u>: Encouraging CMPSS workers to attend relevant conferences, seminars, and networking events. These external events enable them to stay updated with the latest research, treatment modalities, and innovative approaches.

g) <u>Internal Development Programs</u>: Regularly reviewing and enhancing the internal development of programs to address the evolving needs of the CMPSS workers. These programs may include specialized training, coaching, or leadership development initiatives tailored to their career progression.

Mentorship Programs

Facilitate mentorship opportunities to connect CMPSS workers with experienced professionals in the field. These relationships provide guidance, advice, and a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences, fostering their professional development.

6. Understanding Peer Support Services

In this section, we delve into the scope of peer support services, guided by evidence-based practices. We explore the diverse range of services Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist (CMPSS) workers provide and the proven methodologies that form the foundation of their invaluable contributions to behavioral health and wellness.

Scope of Practice

The Scope of Practice for CMPSS workers, established by the Department of Health Care Services, serves as a vital framework to guide employers in defining job descriptions and roles within the behavioral health sector. While we will provide examples of each practice, it is important to note that there are numerous other ways for CMPSS workers to apply their scope of work, allowing for flexibility and creativity in their contributions to the field.

Engagement – CMPSS provides activities and coaching to encourage and support beneficiaries to participate in behavioral health treatment. Engagement may include supporting beneficiaries in their transitions between levels of care and supporting beneficiaries in developing their own recovery goals and processes.

Example duties:

- Recovery Coaching: Provide one-on-one recovery coaching sessions to beneficiaries, offering guidance and emotional support to help them actively participate in their behavioral health treatment.
- Transitional Support: Assist beneficiaries in navigating transitions between different levels of care, ensuring a smooth and seamless transfer while addressing any concerns or fears they may have.
- Goal Setting and Planning: Collaborate with beneficiaries to help them set personalized recovery goals, create action plans, and monitor progress toward achieving these objectives.

Educational Skill Building Groups – CMPSS facilitate groups to provide a supportive environment for peers and their families to learn coping practices and problem-solving skills to help the peer achieve desired outcomes. Groups enhance socialization, recovery, self-sufficiency, self-advocacy, natural support development, and maintenance of acquired skills.

Example duties:

- Group Facilitation: Lead educational skill-building groups for peers and their families, creating a safe and supportive environment for learning coping strategies, problem-solving skills, and self-advocacy techniques.
- Socialization Activities: Organize group activities that promote socialization among peers, fostering a sense of community and mutual support.
- Resource Education: Provide information on available resources and services to group participants, empowering them to make informed decisions about their mental health and well-being

Therapeutic Activity – CMPSS provide structured non-clinical activity to promote recovery, wellness, self-advocacy, relationship enhancement, development of natural supports, self-awareness and values, and the maintenance of community living skills to support the beneficiary's treatment to attain and maintain recovery within their communities.

Examples:

- Community Integration: Encourage beneficiaries to engage in community-based activities and events to enhance their self-awareness, values, and community living skills.
- Relationship Building: Facilitate sessions that promote healthy relationships and communication skills, helping beneficiaries maintain positive connections within their communities while supporting their recovery journeys.

- Structured Workshops: Conduct non-clinical workshops and activities that focus on recovery, self-advocacy, wellness, and the development of natural supports.

Evidence-based peer practices

Within this section, we delve into pivotal practices essential to peer work in behavioral health, offering valuable perspectives on their significance for management and workplaces. Comprehending these evidence-based practices can empower management and supervisors to maximize the potential of peer work, leading to improved outcomes for clients and increased job satisfaction for Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist (CMPSS) employees.

The Helper Therapy Principle

The helper therapy principle is the concept when an individual helps someone who suffers from a similar condition, that individual (the helper) also benefits from the dynamic. Research indicates that helpers can experience improved longevity, physical well-being, and reduced stress hormones. Additionally, they may gain enhanced self-confidence, increased life satisfaction, and reduced depression.

> *Comprehending these evidence-based practices can empower management and supervisors to maximize the potential of peer work, leading to improved outcomes for clients and increased job satisfaction for Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS).*

Management should be aware of the Helper Therapy Principle when employing CMPSS workers for several reasons:

a) Expect Mutual Benefits: Understand that CMPSS workers often experience personal growth and improved well-being as they support their peers. This can lead to increased job satisfaction and effectiveness in their roles.

b) Value CMPSS Workers' Experiences: Recognize that the lived experiences of CMPSS workers can be an asset in providing support and building rapport with clients. CMPSS workers can offer unique insights and relatability that can be highly effective in helping clients.

c) Support Self-Care: Encourage and provide resources for CMPSS workers to engage in self-care and manage the emotional demands of their roles. Acknowledge that supporting others can sometimes be emotionally challenging, and it is essential to prioritize their well-being.

d) Measure Impact Holistically: When evaluating the effectiveness of CMPSS workers, consider not only the outcomes for clients but also the well-being and personal growth of the CMPSS workers themselves. Recognize that these two aspects are interconnected.

e) Promote Peer Worker Peer Support: Encourage CMPSS workers to engage in peer support networks among themselves, where they can share experiences, challenges, and coping strategies. This can further enhance their well-being and job satisfaction.

Peer Listening and Disclosing

Peer listening and disclosing practice involves peers sharing their life experiences and relatability with their clients while skillfully listening. When done correctly, it can encourage clients to engage in health-beneficial behaviors. However, if not handled properly, it can have negative effects on clients. This underscores the importance of proper supervision and support for peers, helping them maintain their well-being and establish appropriate boundaries with clients.

Management can ensure that CMPSS workers manage the peer listening and disclosing practice correctly by implementing the following strategies:

- Ongoing Education: Offer continuous education and professional development opportunities for CMPSS workers to enhance their skills and knowledge in using the peer listening and disclosing practice effectively.

- <u>Supervision and Monitoring</u>: Establish a system of regular supervision and monitoring of CMPSS workers' interactions with clients. This allows management to identify any issues early and provide guidance as needed

- <u>Clear Policies and Boundaries</u>: Develop clear policies and boundaries for CMPSS workers regarding self-disclosure. Make sure they understand the limits and expectations associated with this practice.

- <u>Feedback and Communication:</u> Encourage open communication between CMPSS workers and their supervisors. Create a culture where CMPSS workers feel comfortable discussing challenging situations or seeking guidance when needed.

- <u>Peer Support Networks</u>: Facilitate peer support networks among CMPSS workers, allowing them to share experiences and best practices while also seeking advice and feedback from their peers.

- <u>Client Feedback:</u> Solicit feedback from clients to gauge their comfort and satisfaction with the peer listening and disclosing practice. Use this feedback to make necessary adjustments.

- <u>Regular Check-Ins:</u> Conduct regular check-ins with CMPSS workers to assess their well-being and ensure they are managing the practice in a healthy and sustainable manner.

- <u>Supervisor Training:</u> Train supervisors on how to provide guidance and support to CMPSS workers in managing the practice correctly. Supervisors should be well-equipped to offer constructive feedback and assistance.

- <u>Documentation:</u> Encourage CMPSS workers to maintain records of their interactions with clients, including instances of self-disclosure. This documentation can be helpful in reviewing and improving their approach.

Recovery Planning

Recovery planning is the process a peer thinks through what steps it will take for them to get to their desired healthy self. There are many recovery planning tools peers can use. The Wellness Recovery Action Plan, otherwise known as WRAP, is one popular recovery planning tool that many peers use. WRAP walks peers through how to recognize early warning signs of a crisis, how to create an individualized plan for when a crisis occurs, and how to plan for the aftermath of a crisis.

Managers should be aware of the evidence-based practice of recovery planning that CMPSS workers employ for several reasons:

- <u>Client-Centered Care:</u> Recovery planning promotes client-centered care by empowering individuals to actively participate in their own recovery journeys. Managers should be aware of this to ensure that peer workers are effectively supporting clients in taking ownership of their wellness.

- <u>Enhanced Outcomes</u>: Implementing evidence-based recovery planning practices can lead to improved client outcomes. Managers should understand this to ensure that their peer workers are using effective tools and strategies that contribute to positive client progress.

- <u>Crisis Management</u>: Recovery planning, as exemplified by WRAP, equips clients with crisis management skills. Managers should be aware of this practice to ensure that peer workers can assist clients in recognizing and managing early warning signs of crises effectively, ultimately reducing the likelihood of hospitalizations or emergencies.

- <u>Customized Support</u>: Recovery planning allows for individualized support tailored to each client's unique needs and preferences. Managers should recognize this to ensure that peer workers are offering personalized care that respects clients' autonomy and choices.

- <u>Client Empowerment:</u> Recovery planning empowers clients to actively engage in decision-making about their treatment and recovery. Managers should be aware of this to promote a culture of client empowerment and informed choice within the workplace.

- <u>Reduced Relapse:</u> By helping clients plan for the aftermath of a crisis, recovery planning can contribute to reduced relapse rates. Managers should understand this to support CMPSS workers in effectively assisting clients in their long-term recovery efforts.

- Client Satisfaction: Clients who engage in recovery planning often report higher satisfaction with their care experiences. Managers should take note of this to ensure that CMPSS workers are delivering care that aligns with clients' preferences and expectations.
- Efficient Resource Allocation: Managers should be aware of the benefits of recovery planning to allocate resources efficiently. Effective recovery planning can help reduce unnecessary hospitalizations or emergency interventions, potentially saving both time and costs.

Self-Help Support Groups

A self-help support group comprises individuals who share similar conditions and experiences, offering mutual support to one another. As stated in Mental Health America's facilitation guide for support groups, these groups provide comfort and camaraderie by fostering a non-judgmental atmosphere. This enables participants to freely express their emotions and share their experiences with others who can relate. Managers overseeing CMPSS workers should be well-informed about the self-help support group principle for several compelling reasons:

- Client-Centered Care: Self-help support groups promote a client-centered approach to care, allowing individuals to actively engage with peers who share similar challenges and experiences. Managers should ensure that CMPSS workers can facilitate these groups effectively, thereby enhancing client-centered care.
- Mutual Support: Peer support groups foster a sense of mutual support and camaraderie among participants. Managers should understand this and encourage CMPSS workers in creating environments where clients can connect, share, and draw strength from each other.
- Reduced Stigma: Participation in self-help support groups can help reduce stigma related to mental health and other conditions. Managers should be aware of this to support peer workers in addressing stigma and promoting open dialogue in the workplace.
- Enhanced Coping Skills: Self-help support groups often provide valuable coping strategies and insights from peers who have faced similar challenges. Managers aware of this can coach CMPSS workers to effectively teach coping skills to clients.
- Client Engagement: These groups can boost client engagement and participation in treatment programs. Managers should be aware of the potential benefits to ensure that CMPSS workers effectively integrate support group participation into clients' care plans.
- Quality of Life Improvement: Self-help support groups can contribute to improved quality of life for participants. Managers should recognize this principle to prioritize CMPSS workers' facilitation of support groups as part of holistic care approaches.
- Client Satisfaction: Clients who engage in peer support groups often report higher satisfaction with their care experiences. Managers should take note of this to ensure that CMPSS workers are promoting satisfaction through support group opportunities.
- Resource Utilization: Managers should be aware of the resource-efficient nature of self-help support groups, as they leverage peer-led support to complement clinical care and reduce the need for additional resources.

Peer Bridging

For employers retaining CMPSS workers, it is vital to understand that individuals with behavioral health conditions often face challenging life transitions, such as moving from inpatient to outpatient care, transitioning from homelessness to stable housing, or reintegrating into the community post-prison. These transitions can be particularly difficult for them. Peer bridging, where individuals who have undergone similar experiences offer encouragement, share their own journeys, and empower peer clients to advocate for themselves, plays a crucial role. Notably, a study by the Washington State Health Care Authority's Peer Bridger program revealed that 71% of peer clients working with peer bridgers successfully avoided hospitalization, highlighting the significant positive impact of peer bridging in aiding peer clients through challenging life transitions. Some points to be aware of to support peer bridging follow:

- Training and Education: Providing training and education on peer bridging practices ensures that CMPSS workers are equipped to carry out their roles effectively.
- Enhanced Client Support: Awareness of peer bridging allows workplaces to provide additional support to clients by connecting them with peers who can relate to their experiences, thus improving overall care.
- Inclusive Culture: Supporting peer bridging fosters a culture of inclusion and empathy within the workplace, demonstrating a commitment to understanding and addressing the unique needs of clients with behavioral health conditions.
- Improved Employee Morale: peer workers who engage in peer bridging often find their roles more rewarding and meaningful. This can lead to higher morale among employees.
- Positive Reputation: Embracing peer bridging can enhance the organization's reputation, signaling a commitment to evidence-based practices and client-centered care.
- Resource Allocation: By recognizing the value of peer bridging, workplaces can allocate resources more effectively, reducing the need for costly interventions and hospitalizations.
- Client Feedback: Encouraging CMPSS workers to collect feedback from clients who have benefited from peer bridging can help organizations measure its impact and make necessary improvements.
- Monitoring and Supervision: Establishing monitoring and supervision processes for peer bridging activities helps ensure that they align with company's best practices and organizational goals.
- Community Partnerships: Building partnerships with community organizations that support peer bridging can expand the reach and impact of these initiatives.
- Legal and Ethical Compliance: Being aware of and supporting peer bridging aligns with legal and ethical standards in healthcare, emphasizing the importance of client choice and empowerment.
- Employee Development: Offering opportunities for CMPSS workers to develop their peer bridging skills and advance in their careers can enhance employee satisfaction and retention.

For Resources on Evidence-base peer practices, see Appendix F – Resources for Evidence-Based Practices
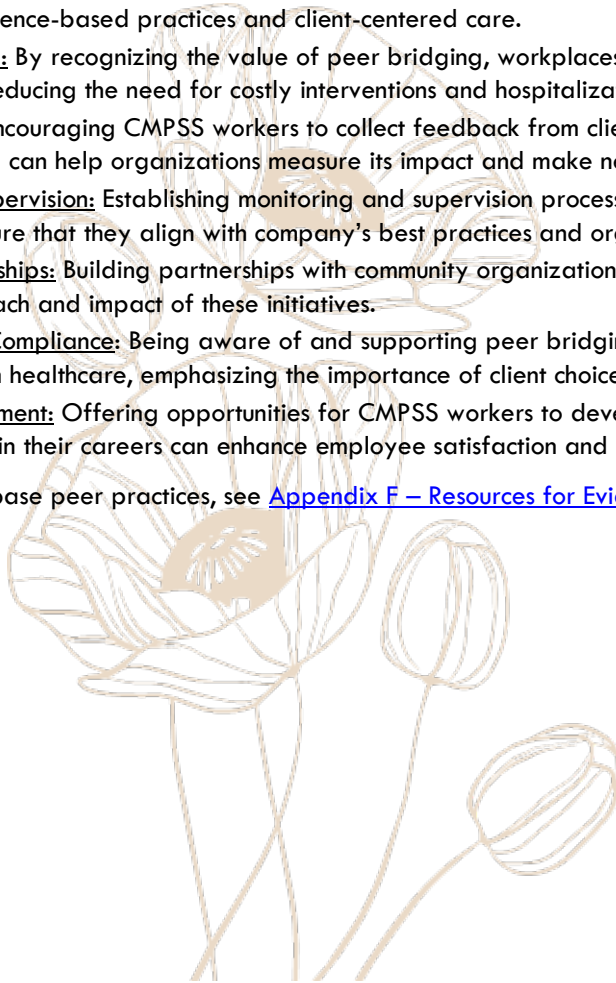
7. Supervision and Support

To effectively support Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist (CMPSS) workers and their roles, supervision must be targeted to address unique needs. Using a combination of supervisory types helps to ensure that CMPSS workers are getting the broad base of support they need to succeed.

State Requirements for CMPSS Supervision

Workplaces must ensure that individuals seeking peer support specialist supervisory roles meet one of the following qualification options:

Option 1:

- Have a Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification; and
- Have two (2) years of experience working in the behavioral health system; and
- Have completed an approved supervisory training.

Option 2:

- Be a non-peer behavioral health professional, including registered or certified substance use disorder counselor; and
- Have worked in the behavioral health system for a minimum of two (2) years; and
- Have completed an approved supervisory training.

Option 3:

- Have a high school diploma or general equivalency degree (GED)
- Have four (4) years of behavioral health direct service experience. May include peer services.
- And have completed an approved supervisory training.

Note: Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Supervisors must take a DHCS-approved Peer Support Supervisory training within 60 days of beginning to supervise a Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist.

Providing Regular and Effective Supervision

Administrative supervision provides basic support related to work coordination, communication and administration following administrative policies and procedures. These may include:

- Assessing quality of work/work performance of the peer worker (ex: evaluations)
- Reviewing of workload/caseload of the peer worker (ex: conducting regularly scheduled supervisory meetings)
- Record keeping

Educative supervision focuses on the development of knowledge and job skills related to the service, as well as the specific role of the peer. These may include:

- Focusing on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the peer worker
- Providing individualized training and support for the peer worker
- Supporting the professional development of peer-workers

> Supervisors must take a DHCS-approved Peer Support Supervisory training within 60 days of beginning to supervise a Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist.

Offering Emotional Support and Encouragement

Supportive supervision helps Peer Support Specialists with coaching to strength self-awareness and interpersonal skills for providing services while maintaining self-care. These may include:

- Providing feedback on work performance (ex: evaluations)
- Providing strength-based affirmations
- Validating concerns of the peer worker and providing encouragement
- Promoting self-care practice

Knowledge of Code of Ethics for Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists

The Code of Ethics for Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists, carefully produced by the California Department of Health Care Services, outlines the essential ethics and values that serve as the foundation of peer support services. Understanding and upholding each of these ethics is of paramount importance, as they shape the very culture of CMPSS workers. Supervisors play a pivotal role in ensuring that CMPSS workers are deeply committed to embracing and living by these ethical principles in their daily work. These principles include:

- Hope
- Person-Driven
- Family Driven & Child-Centered
- Holistic Wellness
- Authenticity
- Cultural Responsiveness
- Respect
- Integrity
- Advocacy
- Confidentiality
- Safety & Protection
- Education
- Mutuality
- Reciprocity
- Strengths-Based
- Wellness, Recovery, Resiliency

For resources and details to the Code of Ethics see Appendix E – Resources for Peer Supervision and Support

8. Workplace Readiness Checklist

1. Using best practices guidelines

☐ Identify the specific audience to review this document, including HR personnel, managers, and potential peer support specialists.

☐ Develop a clear and concise statement of purpose for hiring Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists (CMPSS) or certifying current Peer Support workers

☐ Develop a brief training designed to educate all employees about the history of the peer support movement.

2. Overview of Peer Support Specialists in Behavioral Health Settings

☐ Development of content or training materials that can be shared with employees to emphasize the value of peer work.

☐ Implement a structured training program that covers state qualifications and training requirements for CMPSS

☐ Create a support system to identify, address and mitigate unique challenges with integrating CMPSS workers

3. Recruitment and Hiring

☐ Develop a detailed job description that outlines the requirements and qualifications for peer support specialist candidates.

☐ Establish a structured interview process with predefined criteria for selecting candidates.

☐ Implement a transparent decision-making process for selecting the final candidate.

☐ Design competitive compensation and benefits packages to attract top talent.

☐ Review/create flexible work arrangements that accommodate the unique needs of CMPSS

☐ Provide a clear career development plan, including potential pathways for advancement.

4. Establishing a Welcoming & Inclusive Workplace

☐ Review and amend diversity and inclusion training programs to foster an inclusive environment for peer workers

☐ Review and amend inclusive policies and practices and communicate them to all employees.

☐ Review and amend established procedures for addressing and reporting discrimination and harassment.

☐ Explore innovative training options to further diversity and inclusion training.

☐ Publish guidelines for conduct, protection, reporting, and resolution procedures.

☐ Assign leadership teams the responsibility to develop initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion.

☐ Create and maintain policies and procedures that explicitly support the role of peer workers.

☐ Establish a feedback mechanism that allows peer workers to provide input on policies and procedures.

5. Training and Professional Development**

☐ Develop an onboarding process that includes initial and ongoing training for peer support specialists.

☐ Allocate resources to support continuing education and professional development opportunities.

6. Understanding Peer Support Services

☐ Offer comprehensive training on the scope of practice for peer support specialists.

☐ Ensure that peer workers and their supervisors are familiar with evidence-based peer practices in the field.

7. Supervision and Support

- ☐ Comply with state requirements for CMPSS worker supervision.
- ☐ Establish a regular and effective supervision program
- ☐ Ensure that all Peer Support Specialists are knowledgeable about the Code of Ethics.

9. APPENDIXES

Appendix A - Resources on The History of Peer Movement

- The Early Peer Support Movement, Colorado Mental Wellness Network, Jan 11, 2022, https://cmwn.org/the-history-of-peer-support/the-early-peer-support-movement/
- Peer Support in Mental Health: Literature Review, John Torous, June 9, 2020, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7312261/
- What is a peer? (From Asylums to Recovery video), Mental Health America, https://www.mhanational.org/what-peer

Appendix B - Resources on Peer Support Services in Behavioral Health Settings

- What Are Peer Recovery Support Services?, SAMHSA, 2009, https://store.samhsa.gov/product/What-Are-Peer-Recovery-Support-Services-/SMA09-4454
- Peer Support Workers for those in Recovery, SAMHSA, https://www.samhsa.gov/brss-tacs/recovery-support-tools/peers
- Value of Peers, 2017, SAMHSA, https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tacs/value-of-peers-2017.pdf

Appendix C – Resources on Recruitment and Hiring

- Peer Services Toolkit – A Guide to Advancing and Implementing Peer-run Behavioral Health Services, Dec 31, 2014 - https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Peer_Services_Toolkit%204-2015.pdf
- The Complete Guide To Peer Interviewing – Harver, Erica Hayton, Jan 15, 2021, https://harver.com/blog/peer-interviewing/
- Putting "Career" into Peer Career Development, City Voices, Jan 1, 2020, https://www.cityvoicesonline.org/peer-career-development/#
- The Peer Workforce, Mental Health America, https://www.mhanational.org/peer-workforce#Pay
- Peer Services Toolkit- A Guide to Advancing and Implementing Peer-run Behavioral Health Services, https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Peer_Services_Toolkit%204-2015.pdf
- Enhancing the Peer Provider Workforce: Recruitment, Supervision and Retention, NASMHPD, Sept 15, 2014, https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/Enhancing%20the%20Peer%20Provider%20Workforce_9-15-14%20final.pdf
- National Survey of Compensation Among Peer Support Specialists, Allen S. Daniels and The College for Behavioral Health Leadership, 2015, https://papeersupportcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/CPS_Compensation_Report.pdf

Sample Interview Questions

Below is a list of interview questions tailored to assessing the qualifications of a peer support worker based on best practices. These interview questions aim to gauge the candidate's alignment with the qualifications outlined in this best practice guide as well as their ability to effectively fulfill the role of a peer support worker while upholding the code of ethics and principles of peer support.

Qualifications	Questions
Community Connection and Cultural Familiarity:	Can you describe your connection to the community we serve and how it has influenced your understanding of their needs?
	How do you ensure that your cultural background aligns with the population we aim to support?
	Can you provide an example of how your cultural familiarity has positively impacted your ability to connect with individuals seeking support?
Networking and Local Resource Knowledge	How do you go about building and maintaining a network of local resources and support services?
	Can you share an instance when your knowledge of local resources directly benefited someone you were supporting?
	How would you approach situations where you encounter gaps in local resources?
Lived Experience and Cultural Qualities:	How has your personal experience with mental health or substance abuse shaped your empathy and understanding for those facing similar challenges?
	In what ways do you believe your cultural and linguistic qualities align with those of the community we serve?
	Can you discuss a time when your lived experience positively influenced your interaction with someone seeking peer support?
Embodying Specific Skills:	What specific skills or qualities do you possess that make you an effective peer support worker?
	How do you approach active listening and empathy in your interactions with individuals seeking support?
	Can you provide an example of a situation where you successfully helped someone build their self-confidence or resilience?
Code of Ethics and Role Modeling:	How do you interpret and apply the code of ethics in your role as a peer support worker?
	Can you share an experience where you demonstrated the code of ethics in a challenging situation?

	How would you handle a situation where you disagreed with a decision made by a colleague, while still maintaining the code of ethics?
Adaptability and Learning:	Peer support work involves encountering various situations. Can you describe how you handle unfamiliar scenarios?
	How do you stay updated on new developments in mental health and/or substance abuse support techniques?
	Can you discuss a time when you had to learn quickly to adapt to the evolving needs of an individual you were supporting?
Collaboration and Teamwork:	How do you collaborate with other members of a support team to ensure holistic care for the individuals you work with?
	Can you provide an example of a successful collaboration with colleagues or other professionals to address a complex issue?
Conflict Resolution:	How would you approach conflicts or disagreements that may arise during your interactions with individuals seeking support?
	Can you share a situation where you effectively resolved a conflict while maintaining a supportive environment?
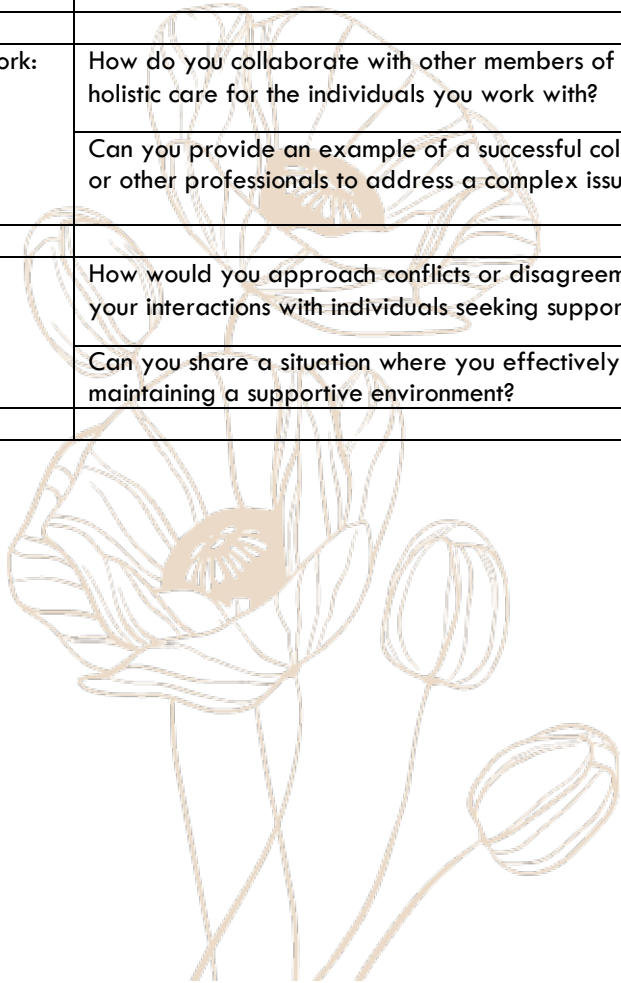
Appendix D - Resources for Work Environment Guidelines

- Person-first and Destigmatizing Language, National Institutes of Health, https://www.nih.gov/nih-style-guide/person-first-destigmatizing-language
- People First Language and more, Disability is Natural, https://www.disabilityisnatural.com/people-first-language.html
- Value of Peer Work, SAMHSA, https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tacs/value-of-peers-2017.pdf
- Tools of Peer Support Role, SAMHSA, https://www.samhsa.gov/brss-tacs/recovery-support-tools/peers

Appendix E – Resources for Peer Supervision and Support

- Code of Ethics and Violation Guidelines for Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists, CalMHSA Peer Support Certification Website, https://www.capeercertification.org/code-of-ethics/
- Supervision of Peer Worker Training, CalMHSA, https://www.capeercertification.org/supervisor-training/
- Training for Specializations, CalMHSA, https://www.capeercertification.org/specialization-training/
- Supervision of Peer Workers, SAMHSA, https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tacs/guidelines-peer-supervision-4-ppt-cp5.pdf
- Supervision of Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists, DHCS, May 17, 2022, https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/Peers-supervision-webinar-5-17-22.pdf
- Supervising Peer Workers – A Toolkit for Implementing and Supporting Successful Peer Staff Roles in Mainstream Mental Health and Substance Use/Addiction Organizations, Centre for Excellence in Peer Support & Centre for Innovation in Peer Support, https://cmhawwselfhelp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Supervising-Peer-Workers-Toolkit-CMHA-WW-2019.pdf
- Supporting, Supervising and Retaining Peer Staff, Mental Health Association of San Francisco, https://www.mentalhealthsf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/MHASF-Peer-Support-Toolkit-Module-3.pdf
- Medi-Cal Code of Ethics for Peer Support Specialists in California, DHCS, July 26, 2021, https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/CSD_BL/MediCal-Code-of-Ethics-for-Peer-Support-Specialists-in-California.pdf

Appendix F – Resources for Evidence-Based Practices

- The Helper Therapy Principle: Using the Power of Service to Save Addicts, Padfield & Pagano, https://www.memphis.edu/law/documents/padfieldpaganohelpertherapyprinciple.pdf
- The Role of Self-disclosure by Peer Mentors: Using Personal Narratives in Depression Care, Truong & Gallo & Joo, 2/12/2019, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6546521/
- Evidence-based Peer Practices for Supervisors, Hollman, SHARE!, https://bit.ly/3sJijAC
- What Is WRAP?, Wellness Recovery Action Plan, https://www.wellnessrecoveryactionplan.com/what-is-wrap/
- Support Group Facilitation Guide, Mental Health America, 2016, https://www.mhanational.org/sites/default/files/MHA%20Support%20Group%20Facilitation%20Guide%202016.pdf
- Peer Bridger Program Fact Sheet, Washington State Health Care Authority, Dec. 2020, https://www.hca.wa.gov/assets/program/peer-bridger-fact-sheet-pdf.pdf
- Peer Bridger Project, New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services Inc., https://www.nyaprs.org/peer-bridger