

Idaho Peer Support Specialist Training Readiness Guide

We're glad you're interested in working as a Certified Peer Support Specialist (CPSS)! Because of their own personal behavioral health recovery experiences, CPSSs are uniquely qualified to support the recovery of others. It can be very rewarding to instill hope and empowerment in those recovering from serious mental health and mental health/substance use co-occurring disorders. However, it is not the right job for everyone, and you must be ready to take on both its rewards and challenges. This guide is intended to familiarize you with the field of peer support, Peer Support Specialist Training, and things to consider before you make the decision to apply for and attend training. ***Before submitting a training application, please read this document carefully and completely to ensure you are pursuing a career that is a good fit for you.***

What is Peer Support?

Peer support is the process of people who have personal lived experience with mental illness or mental illness with co-occurring substance use disorder giving their peers encouragement, hope, guidance, and understanding to support their recovery. It's a powerful process that's based on the belief that recovery is possible for everyone. Peer support focuses on strengths, recovery goals, instilling hope, and building trust. It eliminates the "you don't know what it's like" feeling that many people entering recovery may be experiencing with other services they are receiving. A certified Peer Support Specialist (CPSS) who has experienced the recovery process firsthand and truly understands its challenges is able to effectively offer constructive feedback, establish safety, and role model recovery for their peers. They know what it's like to experience mental illness and overcome the confusion, loss, and grief that often results. Because of this, CPSSs can be integral to a person's recovery by offering consistency and support during a person's recovery journey.

Who are Certified Peer Support Specialists?

Certified Peer Support Specialists (CPSSs) are individuals in recovery from mental illness or mental illness with co-occurring substance use disorder who use their lived recovery experience to support the recovery of others. They know firsthand what recovery is all about because they themselves have experienced their own recovery process. CPSSs have attended peer support specialist training, passed a comprehension exam and skill assessment, and been certified through the Division of Behavioral Health. Sharing a story of recovery is at the root of providing effective peer support and we encourage training applicants to be comfortable doing so prior to applying to the training. This process can be very liberating for individuals who have kept their story to themselves and/or feel that it carries stigma. CPSSs help bust this stigma by role modeling recovery, sharing their invaluable lived experience, and offering service during face-to-face time with peers as employees of a behavioral health organization. The results are incredible for both the CPSS and the peers they work with! Working as a CPSS is a very rewarding position, but it can also be stressful at times and is not for everyone. Please read on to learn about some of the challenges presented by the peer support profession.

Idaho Peer Support Specialist Training

The Idaho Peer Support Specialist Training is for individuals who would like to become certified to work as Certified Peer Support Specialists in the behavioral health workforce. Idaho's training is 40 hours and is facilitated by Certified Peer Support Specialists who are in recovery. It involves group discussion, practicing peer support in pairs, and plenty of time for questions. The Idaho Peer Support Specialist Training is specifically designed for individuals who have lived experience with mental illness and a recovery process, are very well grounded in their recovery, practice self-care regularly, and have a genuine desire to work in this field.

Training Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for the Idaho Peer Support Specialist Training, you must meet **ALL** of the following requirements:

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Have lived experience as someone who has a mental health diagnosis or co-occurring diagnosis
- Have at least (1) ongoing and continuous year of recovery from mental illness or co-occurring disorders
- Be willing to share your experience with mental illness and recovery with coworkers and peers
- Have a genuine desire and commitment to help others with their own recovery
- Have a high school diploma, GED, or higher education
- Feel comfortable reading and writing
- Be able to use a computer, basic software, and email
- Be willing to work productively as a team member with other mental health service provider staff
- Be able to access reliable transportation for attending work and possibly visiting clients' homes
- Read and understand this Peer Support Specialist Training Readiness Guide
- Read and agree to abide by the Idaho Certified Peer Support Specialist Ethics found in this document
- Supply letters of recommendation from (2) individuals who have been involved in your recovery process

****Please note that passing a criminal background check is required in order to work with vulnerable adults and most likely will be a condition of employment as a certified peer support specialist in Idaho. Please confirm that you are able to pass a background check before applying to this training. [Click here for more information about background checks](https://chu.dhw.idaho.gov) or go to <https://chu.dhw.idaho.gov>**

Application Process

Application to the Peer Support Specialist Training does not guarantee acceptance. The application process for the training includes an application, letters of recommendation from (2) individuals who have been involved in the applicant's recovery process, and a 30 minute telephone interview. Letters of recommendation should be typed and written by individuals who have been a close part of the applicant's recovery process and are able to speak to the strength of the applicant's recovery. In order to be considered for the training, applicants must complete the application in full, meet all eligibility requirements, and submit their application with letters of reference by the deadline. Late applications will not be accepted and an application will not be considered complete until it is accompanied by 2 letters of reference. Letters may be sent separate from applications, but must also be sent before the deadline. There may be a larger number of applications than the training seats available, and the eligibility requirements, application process, and phone interviews are used to determine the most viable applicants. If you are not admitted into the training for which you are applying, you must reapply to the next available training. Please note the training application is available only when training dates are scheduled.

Selection Priorities

When a larger number of applications are received than the number of available training spots, applications are weighed based on priorities in order to make trainee selections. In addition to the strength of answers on the application, strength of qualifications demonstrated during the phone interview including lived experience with mental illness and groundedness in recovery, and chronological order of application submission, staff considers the following priorities when making trainee selections:

- Ability to live and work in rural and underserved communities where there is greatest workforce demand
- Strength of genuine lived experience with mental illness as well as strength of groundedness in recovery
- Demonstration of one's genuine desire and commitment to provide peer support services
- Idaho residents, veterans, refugees, and unemployed community members

Cost of Training

Training tuition varies depending on the Idaho entity with whom you are taking the training and is typically \$300-\$400. This cost includes all training materials but does not include travel, accommodations, or lunch. We encourage each applicant who has a relationship with an employer, Vocational Rehabilitation, or a private sponsor to inquire about financial assistance to attend the training if they are not able to pay out of pocket. If you are currently employed and will need to take time off work to attend the training, please discuss this with your supervisor and obtain required permissions before applying. You will not be compensated for lost wages due to taking time off work, and you will not be permitted to leave training early to go to work or attend appointments. Please note training is much more costly when taken out of state. It is up to the applicant to research training opportunities offered outside of Idaho and determine if they qualify for certification within Idaho.

Training Exam

Training facilitators use attendance, participation, and a behavioral assessment to assess trainees on their recovery-oriented behavior throughout the training. Those who successfully demonstrate their groundedness in recovery, have participated openly and willingly, and have attended 100% of the training sessions are eligible to take the training comprehension exam on the last day of training. If an individual does not successfully pass the behavioral assessment, recommendations will be discussed with the trainee. If an individual does not successfully pass the comprehension exam with 80% or greater, he/she must retake the exam within 4 weeks of training completion and steps for doing so will be provided. If the person fails to request to retake the exam within the allotted time period he/she must retake the training in order to retake the exam. Individuals must attend 100% of training sessions, pass the behavioral assessment, and pass the training exam with a score of 80% or greater to be eligible for Idaho peer support specialist certification through the Division of Behavioral Health.

Certification Process

The Idaho Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) is the certifying body for Idaho's Peer Support Specialists. Trainees must complete the DBH certification process in order to be employed and are not immediately certified upon completion of training. Certification information can be found on the Department of Health and Welfare website at <http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/Medical/MentalHealth/PeerSpecialistsFamilySupportPartners/tabid/2935/Default.aspx>. Please review the following certification timeline to know what to expect.

1. A peer completes [Peer Support Specialist Training](#).
2. The trained PSS applies for certification through the DHW Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) [using this application](#).
3. If his/her application is complete, the PSS receives a certification in the mail from DBH that is valid for 6 months or 1 year depending on outstanding requirements. DBH has up to 30 days to complete the certification process and mail out the certificate. This means a PSS may have to wait up to 1 month to provide peer support after being trained and completing the application for certification. While waiting to receive his/her application in the mail, the PSS can be interviewing for jobs and doing on-the-job orientation.
4. After receiving a 6 month certification, the PSS is now a CERTIFIED PSS (CPSS). The CPSS uses the next 6 months to accrue 100 hours of work and/or volunteer experience if he/she holds a bachelor's degree or higher in a human services field OR 200 hours of work and/or volunteer experience if he/she does not have a bachelor's degree or higher in a human services field. The CPSS must also receive 20 hours of [one-on-one supervision](#) by a degreed professional in a human services field who holds supervisory capacity at their organization. *Please note the peer support provided during this time can be billed for as long as the CPSS has received his/her initial 6 month certification from DBH.*

5. The CPSS applies for an extension of time from DBH if he/she needs more than 6 months to accrue their 20 hours of supervision and 100-200 hours of work/volunteer experience. The CPSS emails PeerSpecCert@dhw.idaho.gov to notify the DBH Certification Committee about the number of hours they have accrued so far, their plan for meeting their required hours, and an estimate of how much time they predict it will take. DBH understands it may take longer than 6 months to accrue hours and grants these requests.
6. Once completed, the CPSS submits a record of their 100-200 hours of work/volunteer experience and 20 hours of supervision to DBH [using the Work/Volunteer Experience Summary Form](#). More than one form may be submitted if work/volunteer experience was received at more than one place.
7. If their Work/Volunteer Experience Summary Form is complete, the CPSS is granted another 6 month certification for a total of 1 year.
8. The CPSS continues to provide peer support and [earns 10 CEUs annually](#) with at least 1 CEU in ethics.
9. The CPSS applies for annual certification renewal with DBH [using this form](#) and CEU certificates of completion.

Please direct your certification questions to the Peer Specialist Certification Committee at PeerSpecCert@dhw.idaho.gov or 208-639-5720.

Job Readiness

CPSSs work in a variety of professional settings including but not limited to community behavioral health agencies, psychiatric state hospitals, the Department of Health and Welfare, and consumer-run organizations. CPSS jobs are generally part time and offer salaries ranging from approximately \$11 to \$18 per hour. CPSSs are typically paid by the "billable hour". For purposes of understanding the concept of the "billable hour", please take note of the following terms:

- A CPSS is a certified peer support specialist who has been trained and then certified through DBH.
- The terms "peer" and "client" will be used interchangeably to refer to the individual that a CPSS is working with. All CPSSs are indeed peers, however for purposes of this explanation, the terms "peer" and "client" refer to the individual the CPSS is serving.
- The terms "billable unit", "billable hour", and "billable time" refer to the time that a CPSS spends face-to-face with a peer/client.

Please apply knowledge of these terms when reading the following explanation of what it means to be paid by the "billable hour".

Most behavioral health agencies are paid for the services they provide by billing through Optum which is the organization that manages outpatient behavioral health benefits for Idaho Medicaid members. Optum reimburses the agency after services are rendered. Because of this business model, CPSSs are typically paid by the "billable hour". This means that they are paid for the amount of time they spend face-to-face with a peer (client). Every 15 minutes of time they spend with a peer is equal to 1 "billable unit." One hour contains four billable units of fifteen minutes each. If a CPSS meets with a peer for thirty minutes, there are two billable units in the time they spent, and if the CPSS meets with a peer for one hour, there are four billable units in the time they spent. Each agency chooses how much they will pay CPSSs per "unit" of time they spend with a peer.

During the times CPSSs are not face-to-face with peers, they have other responsibilities such as completing mandatory progress notes, making phone calls, and commuting to meet with peers. The rate of pay for these activities is typically lower because it is not measured in billable units the way face-to-face peer support is. Each agency chooses how much they compensate during the time that is *not* spent face-to-face with peers but is spent doing other work. Here's an example: a CPSS calls a client to remind her that they have a meeting at the client's home on Tuesday at 11:00 AM. Aside from making the phone call, the CPSS must document the call to the client in her progress note which describes all contacts that have been made with the client. The phone call and documentation does not take place face-to-face so it cannot be classified as "billable time." So how does a CPSS get paid for their time spent talking to the peer on the phone and writing mandatory documentation? Some agencies compensate office hours at a lower rate of pay than "billable time". Other agencies may provide a specified number of hours per week at a lower rate of pay for CPSSs to make phone calls or write notes. The amount of time and rate of pay for both face-to-face peer support and time spent doing other related work will vary from agency to agency. When they interview for jobs, CPSSs should ask about the rate of pay for note writing, phone calls, commuting, and all other time spent working that is not "billable time".

There is a reason that agencies must typically pay CPSSs one rate of pay for the hours they spend face-to-face with peers which is "billable time" and a lower rate of pay for time spent completing other tasks which is *not* "billable time". The reason for this is that agencies must pay CPSSs out of their own pocket for work other than face-to-face peer support because this time is not billable or reimbursable. This means that managed care organizations do not pay behavioral health agencies for the time that a CPSS is not face-to-face with a peer. These non-face-to-face activities must then be compensated with a lower rate of pay in order for agencies to be sustainable. This is very common practice for most all healthcare services, and these policies apply to CPSSs as well as CBR specialists, case managers, and other behavioral health professionals.

Please note that education on compensation, billing, documentation, and policies and procedures is *not* included in the Idaho Peer Support Specialist Training because these are unique to each agency. These are all important topics to ask about during a CPSS job interview, and employers should review these topics when you are hired.

Challenges for Certified Peer Support Specialists

- Being paid by the billable hour can present challenges for CPSSs because they cannot be paid in the event that a client cancels or doesn't show up to their appointment. For this reason, CPSSs do not take home the same amount of pay each month. Providing appointment reminders can help mitigate this issue along with any other strategies a CPSS determines with their supervisor's help.
- CPSSs may encounter a lack of agency readiness. Peer support has just begun its integration into Idaho's behavioral health agencies and many staff members may be unclear about the difference between peer support and the role of case managers or CBRs workers. These important differences should be discussed at staff meetings and CPSSs should inquire about the readiness of the agencies they are interested in.
- It may be difficult for CPSSs to find time to establish solid professional relationships with their coworkers, however they must communicate regularly with the counselors, CBRs workers, case managers, and other staff they work with. CPSSs have a wonderful opportunity to role model recovery and set an example by establishing positive relationships with coworkers.
- CPSSs may face challenges while determining how to set a schedule that works for them, navigating and taking notes in clients' electronic health records, and learning about HIPAA, policies, and billing procedures. These are all skills that can be learned with determination and will be taught on the job rather than in the training.

- Building relationships and trust with clients, and practicing **boundaries** and self-care while supporting others can also be challenging. **DRAWING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES IS AN ABSOLUTE MUST FOR CPSSs!!** CPSSs may work with individuals experiencing severe mental illness and may encounter crisis frequently. CPSSs also experience the grief and loss that sometimes accompanies close relationships with individuals experiencing mental illness.

It's very important that applicants understand these challenges and determine if the peer support profession is the right fit. Despite possible challenges, working as a certified peer support specialist is undoubtedly rewarding and wonderful benefits result for peers, CPSSs, and the behavioral health system! Peers are supported in their recovery by CPSSs sharing their story, CPSSs are supported in their recovery by sharing the incredibly valuable lived experience they have, and the behavioral health system furthers its trend toward recovery based approaches to care.

Training Readiness

Please consider the following questions as you make your decision about applying to the Idaho Peer Support Specialist Training:

- Do you know what a Peer Support Specialist does? Is this something you want to commit to doing?
- The training provides frequent short breaks, but is intensive and can be fatiguing. Do you have the energy to stay focused and alert for 100% of the training?
- Are you able to pass a background check?
- If you are traveling, you must be out of town for the entire week plus travel time. Are you prepared to spend that much time away from home and work?
- You must attend the 5 days of training in full or you will not be eligible to take the comprehension exam. Are you ready to make this time and energy commitment?
- The training is highly interactive and requires activities that involve working in small groups and pairs, role playing, group discussion, and reading aloud. Are you comfortable with these types of participation?
- Have you attended either formal or adult education classes in the past five years? If not, will you find it difficult to adjust to the training environment?
- You will be expected to participate in discussions and role plays using elements of your own recovery story. Are you comfortable participating in a group and sharing your recovery story with others?
- You will also be listening to the recovery stories of others. Sometimes these stories might be uncomfortable, particularly if they touch upon one of your triggers. How will this affect you?
- This is *not* a self-empowerment class. The training has been specifically designed to teach peers how to support others in their recovery. Are you grounded in your recovery in a way in which you will consistently role model it for others?
- Are you practicing daily self-care and ready to support others in doing so?
- Are you prepared to draw boundaries with your peers in order to keep your own recovery a priority?
- Following training, you will need to obtain work and/or volunteer experience in order to become a Certified Peer Support Specialist. How do you feel about entering the workforce if it has been a while since you've had a job?
- Do you understand what it means to be paid by the billable hour and are you comfortable with this?
- If you have SSI or SSDI benefits, do you know how much you are able to work and earn each month?
- Do you feel ready to work as part of a team and independently in an intimate setting with your peers?
- Are you willing to make yourself available to your peers in order to establish strong and trusting relationships so that you can provide the most effective peer support possible?

- There will be additional steps you will need to take to complete your Peer Support Specialist certification through the Division of Behavioral Health. Do you know what this involves and are you willing to pursue this process?
- You will need to complete continuing education requirements to renew your certification each year. Are you willing to make this commitment?

This guide is intended to inform your decision to apply to the Idaho Peer Support Specialist Training. The training provides the pathway to a career in which you are able to share the value of your lived experience in a professional setting.

For more information please contact:

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Idaho Certified Peer Support Specialist Code of Ethics & Professional Conduct

Peer Support is a helping relationship between mental health clients and Certified Peer Support Specialists. The primary responsibility of Certified Peer Support Specialists is to help those they serve achieve self-directed recovery. They believe that every individual has strengths and the ability to learn and grow. As such, Certified Peer Support Specialists are committed to providing and advocating for effective recovery-based services for the people they serve in order for them to meet their own needs, desires, and goals.

1. Certified Peer Support Specialists seek to role-model recovery.
2. Certified Peer Support Specialists respect the rights and dignity of those they serve.
3. Certified Peer Support Specialists respect the privacy and confidentiality of those they serve.
4. Certified Peer Support Specialists openly share their personal recovery stories with colleagues and those they serve.
5. Certified Peer Support Specialists maintain high standards of personal conduct and conduct themselves in a manner that fosters their own recovery.
6. Certified Peer Support Specialists never intimidate, threaten, or harass those they serve; never use undue influence, physical force, or verbal abuse with those they serve; and never make unwarranted promises of benefits to those they serve.
7. Certified Peer Support Specialists do not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, or mental or physical disability.
8. Certified Peer Support Specialists never engage in sexual/intimate activities with colleagues or those they serve.
9. Certified Peer Support Specialists do not accept gifts of significant value from those they serve.
10. Certified Peer Support Specialists do not enter into dual relationships or commitments that conflict with the interests of those they serve.
11. Certified Peer Support Specialists do not abuse substances under any circumstances while they are employed as a Certified Peer Support Specialist.
12. Certified Peer Support Specialists work to equalize the power differentials that may occur in the peer support/client relationship.
13. Certified Peer Support Specialists ensure that all information and documentation provided is true and accurate to the best of their knowledge.
14. Certified Peer Support Specialists keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to recovery, and openly share this knowledge with their colleagues and those they serve.
15. Certified Peer Support Specialists remain aware of their skills and limitations, and do not provide services or represent themselves as expert in areas for which they do not have sufficient knowledge or expertise.
16. Certified Peer Support Specialists do not hold a clinical role and do not offer primary treatment for mental health issues, prescribe medicine, act as a legal representative or provide legal advice, counseling, therapy, social work, drug testing, or diagnosis of symptoms and disorders.

Certified Peer Support Specialists must complete ethics training approved by the certifying body at least once per year and maintain personal documentation of completed ethics training.

Certified Peer Support Specialists must understand and adhere to Idaho's Certified Peer Support Specialist Code of Ethics & Professional Conduct. A Code of Ethics violation is the failure to do so. Individuals who have violated the Code of Ethics & Professional Conduct will follow the process for corrective action put forth by the certifying body approved by the Idaho Division of Behavioral Health.