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SAPC INFORMATION NOTICE 23-04

April 21, 2023

TO: Los Angeles County Substance Use Disorder
Contracted Treatment Providers

FROM: Gary Tsai, M.D., Division Director *GT*
Substance Abuse Prevention and Control

SUBJECT: CERTIFIED PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST PROGRAM

Effective July 1, 2022, Senate Bill 803 (SB 803) authorized the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to seek federal approval to add Peer Support Specialists as a new Medi-Cal provider type and Peer Support Services as a Medi-Cal benefit. SB 803 also directed DHCS to develop State standards for Medi-Cal Peer Support Certification Programs to be implemented by counties or county-contracted entities. The [California Mental Health Services Authority](#) (CaMHSA) is the entity contracted by DHCS to develop and implement the Medi-Cal Peer Support Certification Program.

The Los Angeles County, Department of Public Health’s Division of Substance Abuse Prevention and Control (DPH-SAPC) and the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH) elected to opt-in to the DHCS Peer Support Services program beginning in Fiscal Year 2022-2023 with certifications administered by CaMHSA. This Information Notice applies to the implementation of the Certified Peer Support Specialist Program for DPH-SAPC.

Certified Peer Support Specialist

A Certified Peer Support Specialist is an individual who has experience with the process of recovery, either themselves or as a parent, caregiver, or family member, with current certification under CaMHSA’s Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Program. The individual must meet all other applicable California State requirements indicated below.

Certified Peer Support Specialists Requirements

To become certified, individuals must:

1. Be at least 18 years of age.
2. Possess a high school diploma or equivalent degree.
3. Be self-identified as having experience with the process of recovery from mental illness or substance use disorder (SUD), either as a consumer of these services or as the parent, caregiver, or family member of a consumer.
4. Be willing to share their experience.
5. Have a strong dedication to recovery.
6. Agree, in writing, to adhere to a code of ethics.
7. Successfully complete required Peer Support Specialist curriculum and training.
8. Pass the CalMHSAs certification examination.

Supervision of Certified Peer Support Specialists

Certified Peer Support Specialists must provide services under the direction and supervision of a Behavioral Health Professional that meets at least one of the below qualifications:

- Hold a Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Program certification and have two years of experience of behavioral health direct service experience; **or**
- Possess a minimum of two years of experience working as a non-peer behavioral health professional (including registered and certified SUD counselors) in the behavioral health system; **or**
- Hold a high school diploma **or** GED and four years of behavioral health direct service experience that may include peer support services.

Behavioral Health Professionals must be licensed, waived, certified, or registered in accordance with applicable State of California licensure requirements and listed in the California Medicaid State Plan as a qualified provider of the Drug Medi-Cal Organized Delivery System (DMC-ODS).

As with all SUD services, Peer Support Services must be provided as a component of the individualized Plan of Care developed for each patient by a Licensed Practitioner of the Healing Arts (LPHA). While the LPHA directing services in accordance with an individualized Plan of Care assumes the overall responsibility for the Peer Support Services provided to each patient, the LPHA is not required to be present at the time-of-service delivery. Also, the direct supervisors of Peer Support Specialists do not need to be LPHAs. Using Certified Peer Support Specialists as supervisors is highly encouraged. Opportunities for career advancement are important as the Certified Peer Support Specialist workforce is established.

A [Certified Peer Support Specialist Supervisor](#) must meet applicable California state requirements including completing the Peer Support Specialist Supervisor Training within 60 days of beginning supervision of Certified Peer Support Specialists. The [Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Supervisor training](#) is available at no cost on the CalMHSAs website. For additional guidance regarding Peer Support Specialist Certification and Peer Support Specialist Supervisor standards, refer to [BHIN 21-041](#).

Peer Support Specialist Certification Process

CalMHSA is the certifying entity for the Certified Peer Support Specialist Program in Los Angeles County. To provide DMC-ODS reimbursable Certified Peer Support services, individuals must complete the certification process developed by CalMHSA. All certification guidelines and associated fees are set by CalMHSA and approved by DHCS. For information on fees for certification or the certification process, please refer to CalMHSA's [Fee Schedule](#).

Peer Support Specialist Certification Training

The Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Training is an 80-hour training that covers 17 core competencies and the Peer Code of Ethics. It is designed to give Certified Peer Support Specialist candidates the tools to support clients through their recovery process. Certified Peer Support Specialist candidates must complete the training with a CalMHSA-approved vendor to be considered for certification. A list of approved vendors can be found on the [CalMHSA website](#). Training options include virtual, in-person, or hybrid. Training costs vary by approved vendors.

In addition to the required core curriculum there will be four optional specialized trainings available to Certified Peer Support Specialists. These trainings will provide additional tools to Certified Peer Support Specialists supporting special populations including:

1. Parent, caregiver, and family member;
2. People who are unhoused;
3. People who are justice-involved; and
4. People who are in need of crisis services.

These areas of specialization are not required for certification as a Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist and are estimated to be available during Fiscal Year 2023-24.

Peer Support Specialist Certification Exam

The Peer Support Specialist Certification Exam is administered by CalMHSA and offered through live-online proctoring or in-person testing centers. The online exam is delivered through Pearson VUE's online delivery system. The exam is a 2.5 hour, 120-item multiple choice exam. A [test preparation guide](#) along with [day of exam preparation tips](#) are available on the CalMHSA website. Exam-takers seeking exam accommodations must complete the [Exam Accommodations Form](#) and submit the completed form to CalMHSA before registering for the exam. Candidates can take the certification exam up to three (3) times during a 12-month period. Each retake requires a new retake request and associated fees must be submitted to CalMHSA.

Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Registry

Once an individual has completed the Certified Peer Support Specialist Certification Process and passed the Certification Exam, they will receive a certificate and their certification verification will be accessible to the public via the [CalMHSA Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Registry](#).

Peers Support Specialists must have an active Certification to provide DMC-ODS reimbursable services. Certifications are valid for two years from the date of issue. Certified Peer Support Specialist must renew their certification biannually by completing 20 hours of continuing education and completing CalMHSA's recertification process.

If an individual's certification lapses and is within four years of when the certification renewal was due, the individual must meet all Certified Peer Support Specialist Requirements, complete a 40-hour training, and pass the certification exam to reinstate certification.

Peer Support Services - As defined by DHCS:

- Are culturally competent individual and group services that promote recovery, resiliency, engagement, socialization, self-sufficiency, self-advocacy, development of natural supports and identification of strengths through structured activities such as group and individual coaching designed to set and make progress toward recovery goals.
- Services aim to prevent relapse, to empower individuals through strength-based coaching, to support linkages to community resources, and to educate beneficiaries and their families about their conditions and the process of recovery.
- Peer Support Services may be provided to the individual or significant support person and may be provided in a clinical or non-clinical treatment setting, with or without the beneficiary present.
- Peer Support Services may be delivered in-person or via telephone, telehealth, or at approved Field Based Service sites.
- Reimbursable Peer Support Services are limited to the services outlined in the section below and based on a Plan of Care approved by a behavioral health professional or a Peer Support Specialist Supervisor.
- The Plan of Care should be submitted in accordance with the guidelines presented in the Documentation section of this policy. In residential treatment services, Peer Support Services would count toward weekly therapeutic hours. For more guidance, please refer to the SAPC Staffing Guidelines.

Medi-Cal Reimbursable Services Provided by Peer Support Specialists

- H0025 Behavioral Health Prevention Education Services
 - Educational Skill Building Groups: Providing a supportive environment in which beneficiaries and their families learn coping mechanisms and problem-solving skills to help beneficiaries achieve desired outcomes. These groups promote skill building for beneficiaries in the areas of socialization, recovery, self-sufficiency, self-advocacy, development of natural supports, and maintenance of skills learned in other support services.
- H0038 Self-Help/Peer Services
 - Engagement: Activities and coaching led by Peer Support Specialists 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.

- Therapeutic Activity: A structured non-clinical activity provided by Peer Support Specialists 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. These activities may include, but are not limited to, advocacy on behalf of the beneficiary; promotion of self-advocacy; resource navigation; distribution of naloxone or other overdose prevention supplies in accordance with established distribution policies; and collaboration with the beneficiaries and others providing care or support to the beneficiary, family members, or significant support persons.

In Los Angeles County, individuals eligible for the substance use benefits package, including Peer Support Services are described within the Covered Beneficiaries and Eligible Participants section of the current version of the SAPC Provider Manual. This includes Medi-Cal and My Health LA (MHLA) eligible/enrolled participants. Providers may refer to the most current Rate Bulletin for additional information on billing processes and rates. For additional information regarding eligible net populations, please reference the current version of SAPCs Provider Manual.

Per guidance in [BHIN 22-056](#), Certified Peer Support Specialists can serve as the Contingency Management (CM) coordinator at a participating DMC-ODS provider site and administer CM services. The CM Coordinator will be the main point of contact for those in the Recovery Incentives Pilot Program. The pilot is expected to run through March 2024.

Certified Peer Support Specialist Sage User Enrollment

Certified Peer Support Specialists will need access to Sage, Los Angeles County's Substance Use Disorder Electronic Health Record System, in order to document reimbursable services. SAPC has developed two different access levels for Certified Peer Support Specialists:

1. Certified Peer Support Specialist – This access group allows Certified Peer Support Specialist staff to conduct non-clinical treatment services including Educational Skill Building, Engagement Services, Therapeutic Activity, problem list/treatment plans and documentation of services.
2. Financial + Certified Peer Support Specialist – This access group is intended for Certified Peer Support Specialists who also may submit billing claims.

For more information on [accessing Sage](#), please refer to the [Sage User Onboarding/Offboarding and Privilege Management](#) document.

Documentation

Peer Support Services must be based on an approved, individualized Plan of Care to be reimbursable. Certified Peer Support Specialists can develop a Plan of Care, but the Plan of Care must be reviewed and signed by a LPHA or a Peer Support Specialist Supervisor.

The Plan of Care shall be documented using the Plan of Care note option in Sage, for primary Sage user or within a SAPC-approved EHR Progress Note format for Secondary Sage users, and approved/signed by a Behavioral Health Professional or a Peer Support Specialist Supervisor within the time frames listed below:

For patients in non-residential treatment settings:

- Within 30 calendar days of first service or first intake appointment for patients over the age of 21; **or**
- Within 60 calendar days of first service or first intake appointment for youth (ages 12-17) and youth adults (ages 18-20), and all adults (age 21+) who are documented as experiencing homelessness.

For patients in Residential treatment settings:

- Within 7 calendar days of first service or first intake appointment in residential settings for adults (ages 18+); **or**
- Within 14 calendar days of first service or first intake appointment in residential settings for youth (ages 12-17).

The Plan of Care should be reviewed and updated when clinically appropriate to reflect significant changes in the patient's treatment and signed by a LPHA or a Peer Support Specialist Supervisor:

- No later than every 90 calendar days after the initial Plan of Care approval in outpatient settings, **or**
- No later than every 30 calendar days after the initial Plan of Care approval in residential settings.

The documented Plan of Care is developed with patient involvement and includes the long- and short-term goals of the patient. The progress note needs to specify when there is an updated Plan of Care, or a review of the Plan of Care. Refer to the Peer Support Services Plan of Care Guidelines below that providers can adapt in accordance with their current documentation formatting. In addition, Peer Support Services must be documented in a progress note within three (3) business days, in alignment with the requirements listed in the current version of SAPC's Provider Manual and DHCS Documentation requirements for [DMC-ODS services](#).

Peer Support Services Plan of Care Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to be used within a Progress Note as a Miscellaneous note type. Below are the minimum requirements of what to include in a Plan of Care.

1. Indicate if this is a new Plan of Care, updated plan or review of an existing Plan of Care
2. Long-term Goals
3. Short-term Goals (S.M.A.R.T.)
4. Indicate that the patient participated in and agreed with this Plan of Care.
5. Signatures: Peer Certified Specialist, Supervisor (e.g., Behavioral Health Professional (including LPHAs), Peer Certified Specialist Supervisor)

Complaints, Appeals, and Investigations

DHCS will conduct a review of a Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Program upon receipt of a complaint regarding the violation of an applicable law or guidance. DHCS will not conduct reviews pertaining to individual Certified Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialists. Complaints may only be submitted by those who have applied for Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification, their designated representative, a staff member from the Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification program, or a county staff member.

Complaints regarding Medi-Cal Peer Support Specialist Certification Programs may be submitted to DHCS at peers@dhcs.ca.gov or submitted by mail to: Department of Health Care Services, Behavioral Health MS 2710, P.O. Box 997413, Sacramento, CA 95899-7413.

CalMHSA, the certifying entity, will investigate all complaints made against certified Peer Support Specialists and approved training entities. CalMHSA will also review any appeals related to denials for application for certification, suspension or revocation of a certification, denials for certification renewal and denials for application for training. Information on how to file a complaint will become available on the CalMHSA Certification Registry.

Complaints regarding agencies delivering Peer Support Services or complaints regarding a Certified Peer Support Specialist can be submitted directly to SAPC at SAPCmonitoring@ph.lacounty.gov.

Additional information and resources can also be found on [DPH-SAPC's Certified Peer Support Specialist webpage](#). If you have any questions or need additional support, please contact the Systems of Care Branch by email at SAPC_ASOC@ph.lacounty.gov.

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