



A FIELD GUIDE FOR STATE, COUNTY, AND WORKFORCE SYSTEMS

# From Certification to Employment

Connecting certified peer supporters to peer jobs, and keeping them there

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## The gap between a credential and a peer job

States and counties invest in training and certifying peer supporters. Most people who earn a peer credential do find work. But many don't find, or don't stay in, the peer jobs they trained for.

That gap is a systems problem, not a motivation problem. This guide is about closing it.

### WHAT ONE MULTISTATE STUDY FOUND

Among certified peer specialists in four states, overall employment stayed between 73% and 77% across three years. But the share working in peer support positions fell from 73% to 63%.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ostrow, L., Pelot, M., Robinett, K., Salzer, M. S., & Burke-Miller, J. K. Employment Status Following Peer Specialist Certification: Results of a 3-Year Multistate Survey. Psychiatric Services, published online February 13, 2025. [doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.20240166](https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.20240166)



# What the research shows

The best long-term data points to a leak in the pipeline, not a lack of jobs or interest.

|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Certified people find work</b>    | In a three-year survey of 591 certified peer specialists in four states, 76%, 73%, and 77% were employed in the three survey years. <sup>1</sup>                        |
| <b>Fewer stay in peer roles</b>      | The share working in peer support positions dropped from 73% in 2020 to 63% in 2022. <sup>1</sup>                                                                       |
| <b>Peer jobs have real strengths</b> | People in peer jobs reported higher job satisfaction, more access to benefits, and longer average job tenure than those in other jobs. <sup>1</sup>                     |
| <b>The researchers' conclusion</b>   | “A significant proportion appeared to leave peer support for other work.” They recommend monitoring these trends to evaluate investments in certification. <sup>1</sup> |

One study, in four states, over three years. Your state's picture may differ. That's a reason to track it (see page 10).

# Why the gap exists

National workforce reviews point to structural causes, not a shortage of people who want this work.<sup>1</sup>

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Informal recruiting           | Many organizations hire peers through word of mouth instead of standard recruiting, so certified people and openings don't reliably find each other.               |
| Hiring requirements           | Broad background check exclusions, driver's license requirements, and education minimums can screen out credentialed peers, even when they aren't tied to the job. |
| Entry-level pay               | Peer roles are often classified at entry-level wages, with few steps up.                                                                                           |
| Credentials that don't travel | Without reciprocity between state certifications, a credential may not count across a state line.                                                                  |
| No clear occupation           | Peer work has no dedicated federal occupation code, which makes the workforce hard to count and plan for (page 5).                                                 |

<sup>1</sup> As reported in National Council for Mental Wellbeing, Mental Health Peer Support Professionals in CCBHCs: A Workforce Integration Needs Assessment, April 2026.

# What peer jobs are called

The same kind of job goes by many names. A certified person searching for one title can miss openings posted under another.

| TITLE                                                                                                                               | WHERE IT'S USED (OFFICIAL SOURCES)                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Peer Specialist                                                                                                                     | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs job postings. <sup>1</sup>                                                   |
| Peer Support Specialist                                                                                                             | Named by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics as a type of community health worker. <sup>2</sup>                  |
| Certified Peer Recovery Supporter (and recovery coach)                                                                              | Ohio's adult peer credential, which covers peer specialists, recovery coaches, and peer supporters. <sup>3</sup> |
| Certified Youth Peer Supporter / Certified Family Peer Supporter                                                                    | Ohio's youth and family peer credentials. <sup>3</sup>                                                           |
| Certified Peer Specialist / Credentialed Youth Peer Advocate / Credentialed Family Peer Advocate / Certified Recovery Peer Advocate | New York State peer titles recognized in state mental health guidance. <sup>4</sup>                              |

Titles vary by state, employer, and funding source. Check what your state and your major employers actually use.

<sup>1</sup> USAJOBS, “Peer Specialist (Outpatient Mental Health-PCMHI),” Department of Veterans Affairs, posted March 2026. [usajobs.gov](https://usajobs.gov)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Community Health Workers. [bls.gov/ooh](https://bls.gov/ooh)

<sup>3</sup> Ohio Department of Behavioral Health, Peer Supporters. [dbh.ohio.gov](https://dbh.ohio.gov)

<sup>4</sup> NYS Office of Mental Health, Guidance on Youth, Family, Adult, and Older Adult Peer Support Services (eff. 11/23/2022). [omh.ny.gov](https://omh.ny.gov)

# Why the data can't see this workforce

Federal job data has no separate category for peer support, and different sources place it in different ones.

## Counted with community health workers

The Bureau of Labor Statistics describes peer support specialists as one kind of community health worker.<sup>1</sup>

## Or with other occupations

When the federal occupation system was last revised, its policy committee said peer work “is captured under other occupations including detailed occupations within the broad occupation 21-1020 Social Workers, depending on actual work performed.”<sup>2</sup>

## What that means

It's hard to count certified peers, see where they work, or project demand. Workforce reviews recommend a distinct occupation code for peer support.<sup>3</sup>

### WHAT SYSTEMS CAN DO NOW

Don't wait for federal data. Track your own: how many people hold each peer credential, how many work in peer roles, and how long they stay.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, Community Health Workers. [bls.gov/ooh](https://www.bls.gov/ooh)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018 SOC, responses to public comments (July 2016). [bls.gov/soc](https://www.bls.gov/soc)

<sup>3</sup> As reported in National Council for Mental Wellbeing, Workforce Integration Needs Assessment, April 2026.

# Connecting credentials to openings

The moment someone earns a credential is the best moment to connect them to a job.

## 1 Build a title crosswalk

List every title peer jobs are posted under in your area, and map them to your state's credentials.

## 2 Tag jobs by credential

On public job boards, let employers tag openings with the peer credential they accept, so candidates can search by credential, not only by title.

## 3 Start placement at certification

Offer job search help, résumé support, and introductions to employers as part of finishing certification.

## 4 Bring employers and candidates together

Hold hiring events focused on peer roles, and help employers post in places certified peers actually look.

### EXAMPLE (HYPOTHETICAL)

For example, a county might send each newly certified peer a short list of current peer openings under every local title, along with a contact who can help them apply.

# Removing hiring barriers

Some hiring rules keep out the very people peer roles are built for. Systems can encourage employers to take a second look.

|                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Background checks</b>  | Some state and funder rules require checks. Where employers have choices, federal guidance describes a targeted screen that considers “the nature of the crime, the time elapsed, and the nature of the job,” with “an opportunity for an individualized assessment.” <sup>1</sup> |
| <b>Driver's licenses</b>  | Require one only when the job truly involves driving.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Education minimums</b> | Ask whether a diploma or degree reflects the work, or screens out lived experience.                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Experience</b>         | Count lived experience, volunteer work, and advocacy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

Hiring rules are legal decisions. Employers should make them with their attorney and HR. This guide is general information, not legal advice.



**Ready to build hiring that welcomes lived experience?** Blueprints, step-by-step toolkits for program leaders, are at [shareandsolve.app/#blueprints](https://shareandsolve.app/#blueprints).

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Enforcement Guidance on the Consideration of Arrest and Conviction Records in Employment Decisions under Title VII, No. 915.002, April 25, 2012. [eeoc.gov](https://www.eeoc.gov)

# Keeping people in peer jobs

Placement is only half the job. The research above shows people drifting out of peer roles over time.

|                     |                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Pay</b>          | Peer roles often sit at entry-level wages. Systems that fund peer services can look at whether rates support fair pay.            |
| <b>Supervision</b>  | Peer-informed supervision and supervisor training help peers stay.                                                                |
| <b>Growth</b>       | Clear steps into senior peer, trainer, and supervisor roles give people a reason to stay in peer work.                            |
| <b>Role clarity</b> | When peers are pulled into other work, the role loses what made it worth choosing.                                                |
| <b>Tools</b>        | Peers get a secure, organization-provided way to stay in touch with young people, instead of being asked to use their own phones. |

Keeping Your Peer Workforce, another guide in this series, goes deeper on retention.

# Credentials that travel

People move, and labor markets cross state lines. Credentials often don't.

|                                |                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>The problem</b>             | Without formal reciprocity between state certifications, a certified peer may have to start over after a move, and regional employers can't hire across the line. <sup>1</sup> |
| <b>What states can explore</b> | Recognizing comparable credentials from other states, reciprocity agreements, and clearer paths for people who move.                                                           |
| <b>What regions can do</b>     | Share job listings and title crosswalks across nearby states and counties.                                                                                                     |

Credential rules are set by each state and change over time. Check your state's current rules.

<sup>1</sup> As reported in National Council for Mental Wellbeing, Workforce Integration Needs Assessment, April 2026.

# Questions for your system

The more of these you can answer, the better you can see, and close, the gap.

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- ☐ Do you know how many people hold each peer credential in your state or county?
  - ☐ Do you know how many of them work in peer roles, and how long they stay?
  - ☐ Have you mapped every title peer jobs are posted under to your credentials?
  - ☐ Can job seekers search openings by credential, not only by title?
  - ☐ Does job placement support start at certification?
  - ☐ Do employers you fund review hiring requirements that screen out lived experience?
  - ☐ Do funding rates support fair pay and supervision for peer roles?
  - ☐ Can people with a peer credential from another state find a path to work here?
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## ABOUT

# Share+Solve and Peer Bridge

Share+Solve and Peer Bridge help organizations run their own youth peer support programs. They don't replace your peer supporters, your training, or your program. They give the work you already do a safe, supervised home.

### Share+Solve

Where peers and young people connect: messaging, check-ins, goals, and meet-ups, with a one-tap 988 call button on the home screen.

### Peer Bridge

Where supervisors see the whole program: caseloads, check-ins, escalations, and program-level reporting.

Private conversations between peers and young people stay between them. Your organization controls its program data, and deletion requests are handled through the platform.

Built by John Dellick, MBA, a nationally recognized peer support professional with nearly a decade in youth peer support and behavioral health.



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