Peer Support Canada

National Peer Supporter Certification Handbook

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This handbook is designed to provide a prospective certification candidate with a clear understanding of the Peer Support Canada Certification Standards of Practice and Certification Process.

This version of the handbook was released in November 2023, and outlines details associated with the udpated operations of Peer Support Canada's Certification Program. The Certification Handbook includes Standards of Practice and certification process for Certified Peer Supporters and Certified Peer Support Mentors.

A Thank you to our Contributors

With gratitude, Peer Support Canada acknowledges the contributions of the volunteers, staff and community partners who invested time, energy, and expertise into developing the original certification program in 2014. These contributors include, but are not limited to:

- The hundreds of peer support workers from across Canada who shared their passion and insights early in the project providing the basis of the Standards of Practice for Peer Support.

- The Peer Leaders Group (PLG), that consisted of 13 people from all provinces and territories except PEI and Northwest Territories, and other advisors recognized for their peer support expertise. The PLG volunteered time and effort to advise on the PSACC[1] Standards of Practice and the PSACC Peer Supporter Certification.

- The Peer Support Canada Certified Mentors who were actively involved in the creation and/or execution of the original PSACC Certification Program:

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In 2023, Peer Support Canada engaged in a review of the original certification program and applied a series of updates. This review and these updates would not have been possible without the contributions of our Peer Support Canada Mentors (listed above*), our Certification Review Committee, the cross-country consultations with peer support workers and peer support managers/leaders that were completed, and the leadership of Peer Support Canada staff. Peer Support Canada wishes to express our sincere appreciation for the contributions of the peer support community across the country.

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[1] Peer Support Accreditation and Certification Canada (PSACC) — Peer Support Canada's original organizational name until 2018.

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[3] Certified Peer Support Mentor (CPSM)

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Land Acknowledgement and a Note on Language

Peer Support Canada recognizes that our offices are located on the lands of the Haudenosaunee, the Anishinaabe, and the treaty territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit. As a national organization, we recognize the colonial histories of stolen land, forced removal, and genocide that Indigenous Peoples have faced across Turtle Island, and the impacts that these histories have on present day.

In peer support, language matters. Peer supporters are asked to be intentional about the language that they use when working with folks who may be coping with a challenge, and to ensure that they are using language that is reflective of the vocabulary being used by the individuals they are supporting. Yet within this document, we have chosen to use colonial terminology and understanding of the land, while intending for this document and our certification process to be accessible to all.

We recognize that the use of terms like "Canada" and "national" have been used to isolate, control and abolish Indigenous Peoples. And we recognize that we still use this terminology, and we use the colonial designation of "Canada" to define the population that our organization serves today.

We ask settlers reading this document and participating in our certification program to reflect on their own relationship with the land and its history, to consider how they may be playing a role in the ongoing colonization of Indigenous populations, and to consider ways that they may be able to support decolonization.

As individuals working within an organization, we recognize that this acknowledgement is only one small step and are committed to supporting Indigenous sovereignty and ongoing decolonization.

About Peer Support Canada

Throughout its existence, Peer Support Canada, and the community surrounding it, have shared a resounding sense of hope, and the belief in the transformative power of peer support. The organization serves as the national voice for peer support across Canada. After substantial cross-country consultation, in 2013 Peer Support Accreditation and Certification Canada (PSACC — the organization's former name) established a framework involving Standards of Practice, Core Values and Principles of Practice to guide peer support workers and peer support programs. Today, Peer Support Canada (PSC) continues to strive towards the mission of increasing the recognition, growth, and accessibility of peer support within the mental health and substance use health spaces.

While Peer Support Canada currently exists as a program of the Canadian Mental Health Association, National, in 2021, CMHA National and PSC made the decision to redraw our partnership. We are prioritizing the re-acquisition of our own independent charitable registration status so we can increase access to funding opportunities and resources to support the expansion of our service offerings. CMHA National continues to provide a home for PSC until we can establish ourselves as an independent organization.

PSC continues to lean into its strengths that include our internal knowledge, experience and expertise in the peer support field, our team of long-standing dedicated volunteers, our lived and living experience leadership and our strong relationships within the peer support community across Canada.

There are 5 priority areas that have been outlined, which we believe will support help us to achieve our mission:

1. Consultation, Training and Professional Development
2. Individual Certification and Training Accreditation
3. Research, Evaluation and Public Policy
4. Community Education, Awareness and Advocacy
5. Organizational Development and Sustainability

For more information about PSC and our vision for future service delivery, please review our 2022–2027 Strategic Plan.

Summary of the 2022-2023 Review and Updates

Reasons for the Review

Between November 2022 and May 2023, Peer Support Canada engaged in a thorough review of our certification program. Reasons for this review and update included the following:

The peer support landscape across Canada had significantly changed since the program was originally designed and launched. There was a desire to ensure that the certification program was still meeting the needs of this changed landscape.

Peer Support Canada staff had received feedback from candidates going through the certification program as well as from organizations that were supporting their staff and volunteers in pursuing certification. We wanted to be able to apply this accumulated feedback as much as possible.

With the launch of the 2022–2027 Strategic Plan, Peer Support Canada needed to consider how the certification program would now fit within the organization amongst its intended future additional service offerings.

With the desired expansion of service offerings, Peer Support Canada has a responsibility to ensure the sustainability of the organization, programs, and services. PSC wanted to re-evaluate whether the certification program was effectively contributing to the sustainability of the organization, and if not, PSC wanted to understand what changes could be made to ensure that this was the case.

Lastly, Peer Support Canada identified a need to deepen our anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices with regards to program content and processes in order to reach, increase accessibility for and ultimately better serve more diverse candidates that better reflect our peer supporter population in Canada.

Review Process

Peer Support Canada embarked on a process of reviewing the content, operations, finances, and outcomes of the certification program. This involved an internal review of the program, solicitation of feedback from stakeholders, research into best practices associated with certification programs and consultation with other organizations engaged in similar work. The methods of the review included:

- Examining the accumulated feedback PSC had received from candidates, organizations who were supporting staff members in pursuing certification, references of candidates and the volunteers and staff members who were operating the certification program.

- Surveying of all individuals who had interacted with our certification program.

- Formal consultation and information-sharing with the Peer Support Canada Mentors around their experiences of operating the certification program.

- The creation of and consultation with a Certification Review Committee made up of 6–10 candidates who had varying experiences of participating in the certification program. 4 initial "information gathering" meetings were held, followed by an additional 7 consultation meetings that took place while updates were being made to the program.

- A deep dive into the finances associated with the operations of the program, including a review of the labour associated with the program and the timelines associated with candidates going through the certification process.

- A literature review and associated report documenting best practices associated with certification programs.

- Consultation interviews with the operators of similar certification programs, both within Canada and internationally.

Each step of this process involved applying an anti-racist and anti-oppressive lens. Peer Support Canada staff actively solicited a variety of perspectives to be involved with the review process, asked targeted questions within consultation conversations around understanding how barriers to access for traditionally marginalized populations were identified and addressed within various certification programs and ensured that the literature review process involved the inclusion of resources specifically speaking to applying anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices to the operations of programming.

What remains the same and what has changed?

The goals of the certification program remain the same: to identify individuals who demonstrate the appropriate skills, knowledge and competencies required of peer support workers to be able to effectively support their peers. This continues to be done through the assessment of candidates' capacity to demonstrate the nationally endorsed Standards of Practice for Peer Supporters. Just as with the original certification program, to receive full certification as a Certified Peer Supporter or Certified Family Peer Supporter, candidates must demonstrate all 5 Standards of Practice. The Standards of Practice emerged out of a robust consultation process with peer supporters across Canada, and these standards remain the foundation of the certification program today. As can be seen from the "Candidate Procedures" section of the

handbook, much of the process for candidates to participate in the certification program remains the same; an application is submitted and reviewed, reference assessments and a self-assessment are collected, a Knowledge Assessment is completed, and candidates are assessed for their ability to demonstrate the required competencies.

All previously earned certifications with Peer Support Canada (PSC) or Peer Support Accreditation and Certification of Canada (PSACC) will be honoured and valued equivalently to those who go through the updated certification program.

Below is an overview of some of the more substantial adjustments that have been introduced following the review of the certification program.
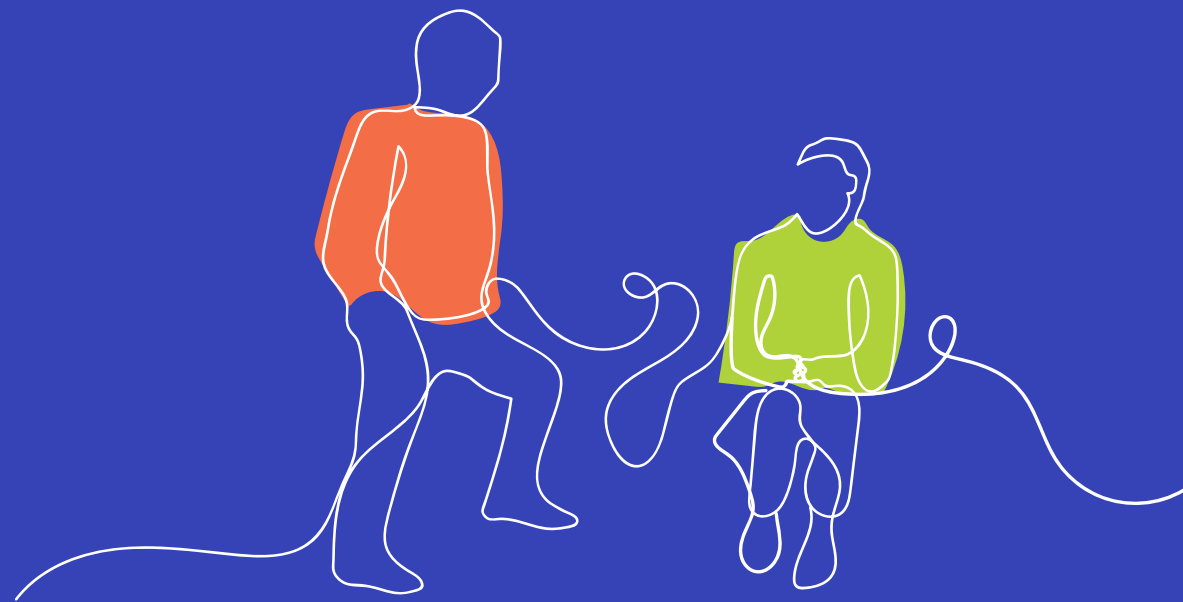
## Shift Towards an Assessment Motivated Program

Throughout the review of the certification program, it became apparent that folks who participated experienced the certification program as a combination of a training and assessment. Candidates expressed they felt as though the training components of the certification program were valuable but misaligned with their goal of being evaluated and granted a certification in acknowledgement of their already existing aptitude for demonstrating the required standards. Many candidates and stakeholders expressed they had previously completed training and that they had been practising as peer support workers ahead of applying for certification. While there is recognition of the peer support value for ongoing learning, many described the requirement to engage in a lengthy training/assessment hybrid as redundant and a disregard for the value of previous experience. The training and mentorship aspects of the certification operations (practicums, phased reports, evaluation, support and feedback processes) were inconsistent and contributed significantly to the high degree of staff labour involved with the process.

Many of the adjustments to the certification program have been made in service of responding to these challenges. The adjustments are aimed at ensuring that the certification program is **uniquely an assessment of a candidate's ability to demonstrate the required standards.** With the intended expansion of Peer Support Canada's service offerings, we are keen to be able to offer alternative services for folks specifically seeking mentorship and training opportunities. With this in mind, we strongly encourage candidates to apply once they already have a thorough understanding and a clear ability to demonstrate the required Standards of Practice.

Introduction of Provisional Certification

Our consultation and review process informed Peer Support Canada staff that a portion of the population seeking certification are looking to gain entry into the peer support field. By requiring 200 hours of formalized peer support experience as eligibility criteria for a candidate's application to be accepted, Peer Support Canada was creating a barrier for individuals to be able to gain entry into the field of peer support. In recognition of the absolute importance of gaining hands-on experience as an opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge and engage in ongoing supervised learning, the provisional certification option was introduced. Candidates who can demonstrate all required standards aside from the Acquired Experience standard are able to achieve provisional certification. If provisionally certified candidates can demonstrate the Acquired Experience standard to Peer Support Canada within one year of achieving provisional certification, then their certification will be upgraded to a full certification and their certificate will be granted.
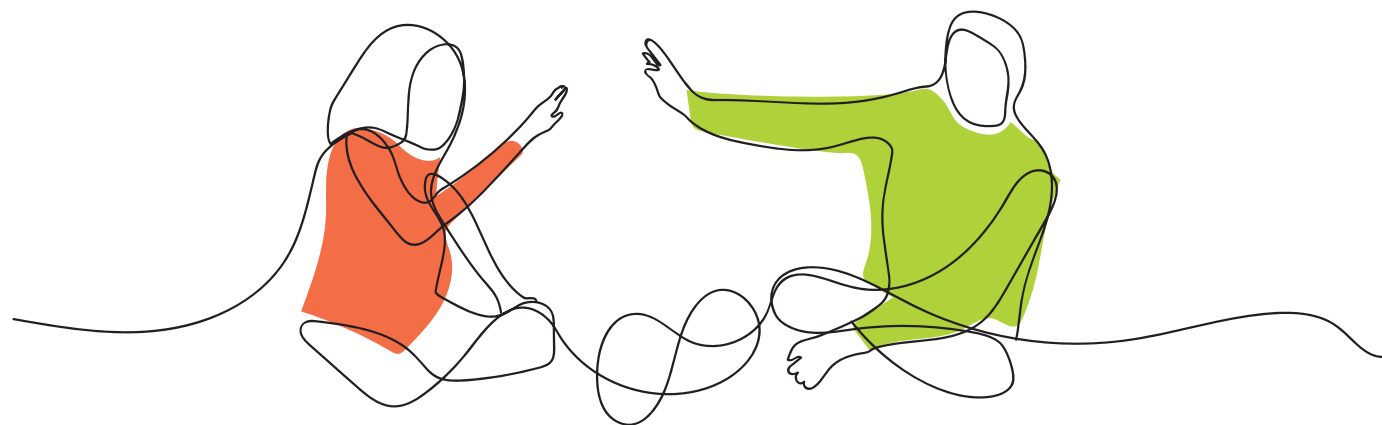
Operations

Throughout the review, it became apparent to Peer Support Canada staff that the certification program was labour intensive, involved a significant amount of staff initiative (rather than candidate accountability) to have candidates complete the steps associated with their certification process, and some practices that involved inconsistent evaluation of candidates' demonstration of the standards. Multiple adjustments were made to the operations of the certification program to address these factors including:

- The introduction of an online candidate portal, which allows candidates to track their individual progress without requiring multiple emails going back and forth between PSC staff and candidates.

- Moving all certification operations internally to be facilitated by PSC staff members, rather than a hybrid model requiring the organization to rely on the contributions of a capacity-limited volunteer base.

- The introduction of more objective evaluation procedures (firm application review criteria and candidate assessment marking rubrics) that are audited on a regular basis.

- The introduction of a formalized accommodations request process at the application stage so the candidate and PSC staff can co-create solutions that mitigate or remove barriers.

- Increased front-loading of information around requirements and expectations of the certification program to ensure that candidates who apply have a clearer understanding of what to expect and can more accurately self-assess their readiness to engage in the program.

- Establishment of consistent processes for declining applications that do not meet the eligibility requirements and not awarding certification to candidates who do not demonstrate the 5 Standards of Practice after being assessed,

- The creation of a formal appeals process whereby candidates may appeal the decision made by PSC staff of either a) declining their application or b) not awarding certification. A separate Certification Committee will review these appeals and will advise PSC staff on how to proceed.

Competency Assessment

Candidates previously completed a practicum ranging from 5 to 20 weeks in length that took place at their current peer support site, or a practicum discussion facilitated by a PSC Certified Mentor as a means of evaluating their capacity to demonstrate the competency standard. In addition to being an assessment, the practicum also served as an opportunity for mentorship/training. The practicum length and content were determined by the candidate's hours of one-to-one peer support experience as identified in their application, and their Knowledge Assessment results. The practicum length was then adjusted based on the Mentor and candidate's analyses of their ability to demonstrate the competencies.

With this model, there were long wait times to be matched with a Mentor, candidates experienced challenges with finding a practicum site, and the practicum design and evaluation were inconsistent across candidates. Moreover, as mentioned above, many candidates found that the practicum requirement was an unnecessary hoop to jump through after already undergoing training and acquiring previous peer support delivery experience.

A verbal Competency Assessment (interview-style) by Peer Support Canada staff has been introduced in lieu of the practicum to respond to this feedback[6]. This will involve a Zoom conversation between a Peer Support Canada Certification Coordinator and the candidate wherein the coordinator selects scenario-based and experiential questions from a question bank with clear evaluation criteria associated with each question. This will ensure that each candidate will have the same opportunity to demonstrate the required competency standard.

[6] Peer Support Canada strongly supports the value of "Ongoing Learning and Development" and recognizes that having an opportunity to receive peer-focused mentorship is an incredibly beneficial opportunity for peer support workers, many of whom are working/volunteering within non-peer environments. Peer Support Canada looks forward to the introduction of a formalized mentorship service offering (separate from certification) to ensure that peer supporters across Canada can access this key contributing component to their professional practice.

Language

Since the original creation of the certification program in 2016, we have adjusted some of the language used in reference to the standards.

- **Lived Experience Standard:** this standard was previously defined as "Lived experience includes experience with a mental health and/or addiction challenge or illness (experienced personally or in relation to a loved one), as well as the experience of finding a path of recovery." Peer Support Canada continues to recognize the unique and key component of lived experience being a defining and essential requirement for peer support work. And the organization is cognizant of the non-clinical nature of peer support which refrains from emphasizing and requiring diagnostic criteria to 'qualify' an experience. The organization is also aware of the barriers to diagnoses and the self-stigma that may prevent individuals who are well equipped and capable of supporting their unique peers to identify with the above definition of lived experience. Therefore, the language surrounding the lived experience standard has been updated to: "Lived experience includes experience with a mental wellness and/or substance use health related challenge (experienced personally or in relation to a family member/loved one), as well as the experience of finding a path of recovery".[7]

- **Formalized Peer Support Experience:** when evaluating the "previous experience" section of a candidate's application, PSC has been relying on the following definition of formalized peer support pulled from the MHCC Guidelines for Practice and Training of Peer Support (2013/2016): "Peer support of a formalized nature assumes that a peer support worker will learn how to ensure that the critical aspects of hopefulness, recovery-orientation, empowerment, non-judgmental acceptance, and trust are promoted within the peer support relationship" (p. 16). PSC staff have found this definition when assessing one's eligibility for certification to be rather broad, often leading to gray areas on determining what is and is not "formal peer support."

For these reasons, the language surrounding the formalized peer support experience requirement has been updated to: "Having formalized peer support experience means one has experience supporting peers in a manner that is consistent with the Peer Support Canada values and principles of practice and has achieved an awareness of how to use their skills and abilities in real situations. It involves intentionally pulling from personal lived and living experiences to support others with similar experiences. Formalized peer support experience involves prior training or some type of preparation, supervision, and job titles such as "peer supporter," "peer specialist," "peer mentor," or "workplace peer supporter."

[7] For more detail, review the Standards of Practice section below.

Introduction to the Work of Peer Support

What is Peer support?

Peer support is a form of service provision, a philosophy, and a movement.

The origin of formalized peer support within westernized mental health services is credited to the consumer/survivor movement, in which people who experienced mistreatment within the traditional healthcare system advocated for and became providers of improved mental health care. The consumer/survivor movement grew up alongside the civil rights movement, gay rights movement, the women's rights movement, and Indigenous rights movements. The success of each of these movements reinforced the success of the others. In addition, while western society has formalized the approach and practices of peer support both inside and outside of our healthcare systems, many of the philosophies and practices existed within Indigenous communities long before the consumer/survivor movement.

As a form of service provision, peer support involves emotional and practical support between people who share a common experience. It is rooted in a philosophy and practice that minimizes power imbalances and fosters equal and empathetic relationships, encouraging people who are coping with challenges to make decisions that are based on their own knowledge and expertise about their own needs, with the support of a peer. Peer support is focused on health and recovery rather than on illness and disability. Peer support can happen in both group and one-to-one relationships. In either scenario, the peer supporter provides emotional and social support to others who share a common experience. This support is grounded in hope, empowerment, and recovery. Peer support is a values-based approach to supporting wellness, rather than an approach rooted in clinically based interventions and formal degrees (which can be inaccessible to people with lived and living experiences of wellness related challenges and traditionally marginalized populations).

Peer support related to mental health and substance use health challenges can take place within community, clinical, education, and workplace settings and can take the form of formalized programs and services or informal human connections. There are many other forms of peer support in community, hospitals, informal networks, and relationships, for individuals and their family members. These are based in shared experiences such as physical health challenges, disability, or ongoing experiences with marginalization, discrimination, or stigma, among other experiences. Peer Support Canada believes in the transformative power of all forms of peer support.

"Peer support is a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful. Peer support is not based on psychiatric models and diagnostic criteria. It is about understanding another's situation empathically through the shared experience of emotional and psychological pain."

- The MHCC Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support (2013/2016).

Two Types of Peer Support Service Provision

Peer support occurs in two formats based on the type of lived experience:

1 Peer support for people with lived experience (PWLE)

2 Family peer support (where the term "family" includes those in a person's chosen circle of support)

Both are peer-to-peer relationships meaning that the individuals or group members involved have in common a similar experience.

PWLE peer support occurs when a person with personal lived experience supports others who have experienced/are experiencing similar lived experience. This may look like someone who has struggled with mental health challenges supporting someone else who is struggling with mental health challenges.

Family peer support occurs when a family member/supporter of someone coping with wellness related challenges offers support to another family member/supporter of someone coping with wellness related challenges. This relationship recognizes the impact shared experience can have on the recovery journey of all involved.

Those with personal experience with a wellness related challenge support others who are experiencing a similar wellness related challenge, and family members/supporters support other family members/supporters. Having experience as both a PWLE and a family member brings value to this work, but the supporter will likely identify with one more than the other depending on the shared lived experience.

Certification for Peer Supporters

Why Certify Peer Supporters?

Peer support certification indicates that a peer supporter has successfully demonstrated the national Standards of Practice as set forth by Peer Support Canada at the time of certification. Certifying peer supporters recognizes the contribution of peer support in the mental health and substance us health fields, in addition to other fields such as physical health, workplaces, etc. and endorses peer support work as a valid and respected profession. Peer support work is a legitimate and highly regarded form of service when provided by a capable person with appropriate skills, attitude, and approach.

Certification holds benefits on both an individual level, and on a systems level. For individuals, certification serves as a validation of one's knowledge, experience, and competencies. Given that the Standards of Practice received endorsement by members of the peer support community across Canada, the credential is national in scope. This recognition bolsters one's respect within the field (we see this especially for Certified Peer Supporters who work on multi-disciplinary teams) and allows for mobility and inter-provincial/territorial collaboration.

On a systems level, certification helps to ensure that peer support services are delivered consistently across the country (while also allowing for flexibility that comes with unique service user needs). This improves the quality of service delivery and increases the amount

of trust from service users. It also increases the amount of respect among funders, partner organizations and colleagues of peer supporters. Including Certified Peer Supporters on multi-disciplinary support teams allows for other colleagues to learn from the lived experience perspective and thus provides the opportunity to call into question oppressive practices.

The certification program will identify individuals who may be right for this work, ensure they have the required skills, experience, and competencies and certify those who have succeeded in demonstrating the national standards as set forth by Peer Support Canada. A certified peer supporter's skills may be used within community organizations, clinical settings, workplaces, or educational settings, and beyond.

For organizations and programs looking to send their staff through the certification, it is important to note the program is setup to assess an individual's demonstration of the five Standards of Practice, not to train or teach. We encourage all applicants to have confidence going into the program of succeeding, rather than using this process as a way of course correction. If you are a manager or supervisor looking for additional support in managing your staff, we invite you to reach out to info@peersupportcanada.ca to inquire about our consultation services.

What Does it Mean to be a Certified Peer Supporter in Canada?

Receiving certification from Peer Support Canada indicates that a peer supporter has successfully demonstrated the national Standards of Practice as set forth by Peer Support Canada at the time of certification. We can attest to and believe in the value of peer supporter certification (as outlined above), and we also recognize that not all peer supporters and organizations will choose to pursue certification. Certification may not be accessible or helpful to all peer supporters and organizations. Because of this Peer Support Canada is not a proponent of peer supporter certification being a requirement for all peer supporters.

Peer support across Canada remains an unregulated profession. This means that there are no mandated trainings that peer supporters must participate in, or governing bodies that peer supporters must be a part of to practise peer support. Nevertheless, Peer Support Canada strongly encourages organizations employing peer supporters to ensure there

is adequate training, peer-led supervision, and ongoing professional development opportunities allotted to peer support professionals. To regulate the profession would mean creating unnecessary and harmful barriers to offering and accessing peer support services. Peer support serves to fill gaps within the healthcare system and beyond, allowing people with lived and living experiences (as well as traditionally marginalized populations) to be able to offer their valuable lived and living experience expertise.

We proudly offer certification to peer supporters who would like to use certification as a way to gain entry into the field of peer support, for peer supporters who are seeking validation of their expertise and skills, for peer supporters who work in environments where credentials are meaningful (such as hospitals and clinical settings), and to organizations who are keen to ensure that their employees and volunteers are able to demonstrate the required national Standards of Practice.

Mentor Certification for Peer Supporters

In the past, Peer Support Canada has offered two levels of certification: Peer/Family Peer Supporter Certification and Peer/Family Peer Support Mentor Certification. To achieve Mentor Certification, one would have had to earn the first level of certification prior. Mentor Certification evaluated individuals' capacity to demonstrate significant experience and success as a peer supporter, and their ability to demonstrate additional knowledge, skills and competencies that are required to mentor peer supporters. There were 2 desired outcomes for mentorship certification:

- There would be individuals who had been evaluated and certified as being effective supervisors/managers/trainers to support their organization's professional development and supervision of peer supporters.

- There would be certified mentors who would volunteer for Peer Support Canada with the expectation that they mentor candidates going through Peer Support Canada's peer/family certification.

Currently, PSC is offering only Peer and Family Peer Supporter Certification and has decided to temporarily pause the Mentor Certification process.

Peer Support Canada wholeheartedly sees value in ensuring that those peer supporters who can demonstrate the required skills and competencies to train and supervise fellow peer supporters are offered the opportunity to do so, and sees mentorship certification as a potential way of ensuring that opportunities for leadership positions for peer supporters are offered. And, throughout the review, Peer Support Canada heard feedback from the community that the value of the mentorship certification wasn't completely understood or recognized by organizations, and that the expectation of certified mentors to volunteer for Peer Support Canada was challenging to expect given the demand on peer supporters who are both providing peer support services and mentoring peer supporters within their own organizations.

Peer Support Canada has made the decision to temporarily suspend the offering of the mentor certification while we work to expand on our service offerings available and establish mentor/trainer certification that fits well within these service offerings, and that meets the needs of the peer support landscape today. All mentor certifications that have been awarded in the past remain valid and recognized by Peer Support Canada.

National Standards of Practice for Peer Supporters

Overview of the Standards of Practice

The Peer Support Canada Standards of Practice specify the knowledge, skills, talents (competencies), and experience that are deemed as necessary for recognition as a Certified Peer Supporter. These Standards of Practice form the basis of the certification program.
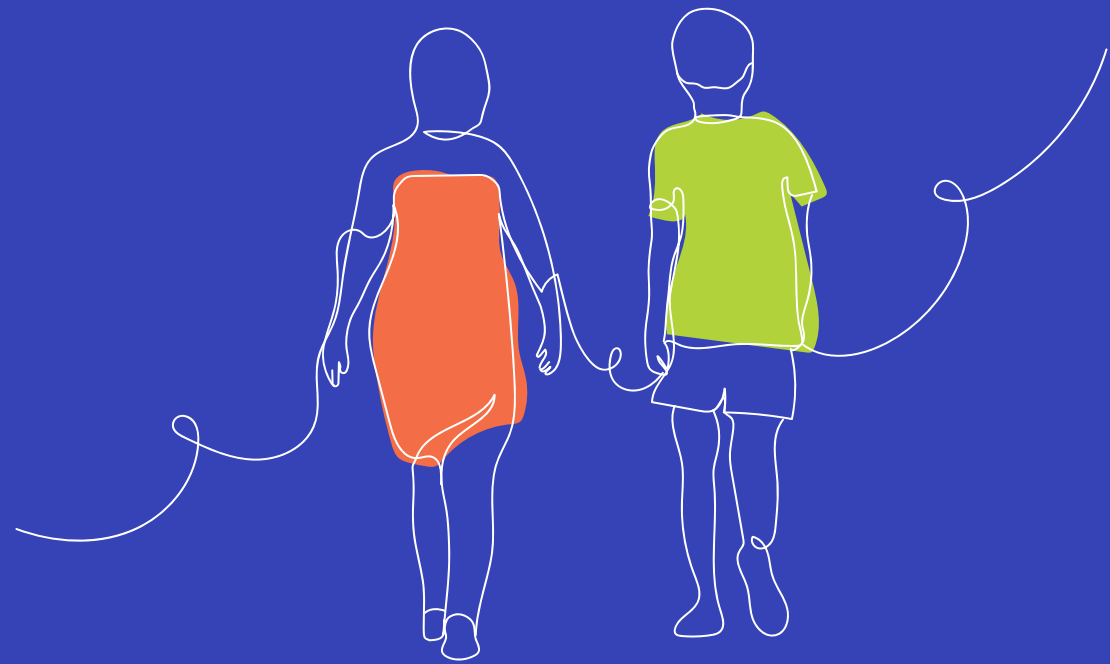
What are the Standards of Practice?

The Standards of Practice include the following components:

Lived/Living Experience: lived and/or living experience with a wellness related challenge such as a mental health or substance use health challenge either personally or as a family member/supporter as well as the demonstration of a positive state of recovery/wellness, and a demonstrated readiness to support others.

Knowledge: the information and know-how that is required to provide effective peer support services.

Acquired Experience: the experience providing peer support that is required to infuse acquired knowledge into experiential practice.

Code of Conduct: the rules that certified peer supporters agree to follow.

Competencies: the natural talent and acquired skills that are required to provide effective peer support services.

To successfully be awarded full certification, candidates will need to effectively demonstrate all 5 Standards of Practice. To be awarded provisional certification, candidates will need to effectively demonstrate all Standards of Practice except for the Acquired Experience Standard. Provisional certifications can be upgraded to full certifications upon demonstration of the Acquired Experience Standard being demonstrated.

The Core Values and Principles of Practice

The Core Values and Principles of Practice guide the work of peer supporters. The Core Values outline the ideals and ethics of peer support work and the Principles of Practice outline the philosophy and behaviours associated with peer support work.

Ideally a certification applicant will identify strongly with these Core Values and naturally understand the importance of abiding by the Principles of Practice. These values and principles underscore the Standards of Practice, which is why it is essential that peer supporters who wish to be successful in the certification program can embody these values and principles and can offer examples of ways in which they do so. Peer support work is rooted in a trusting relationship between a peer who is currently struggling and striving to find understanding and support, and the peer supporter whose personal history allows them to understand, support, and above all model a sense of hope.

Core Values

The integrity of a peer supporter is key to the success of this delicate peer relationship. The Core Values provide the foundation for this important work. The Core Values of peer support are as follows:

Hope and recovery: acknowledging the power of hope and the positive impact that comes from a recovery approach

Dignity, respect and social inclusion: acknowledging the intrinsic worth of all individuals, whatever their background, preferences or situation

Self-determination: having faith that each person intrinsically knows which path towards recovery is most suitable for them and their needs, noting that it is the peer's choice whether to become involved in a peer support relationship

Integrity, authenticity and trust: noting that confidentiality, reliability and ethical behaviour are honoured in each and every ivnteraction

Health and wellness: acknowledging all aspects of a healthy and full life

Empathetic and equal relationships: noting that the peer support relationship and all involved can benefit from the reciprocity and better understanding that comes from a similar lived experience

Lifelong learning and personal growth: acknowledging the value of learning, changing and developing new perspectives for all individuals

Principles of Practice

The Principles of Practice embody the character of the relationship and the philosophy of the work. The Principles of Practice flow from the Core Values and will help to define the Standards for certification as a peer supporter.

Peer supporters:

- Recognize the importance of an individual approach to recovery.

- Honour and respect where each individual is in their own unique journey of recovery recognizing that the focus is on the process and not just the end result.

- Facilitate the self-determination and the empowerment of peers to take an active role in their recovery and wellbeing.

- Recognize that the goals, values and beliefs of their peers may not be the same as their own.

- Are collaborative in building equal, open and trusting relationships with peers.

- Share their lived experiences in a manner that demonstrates compassionate understanding and inspires hope for recovery.
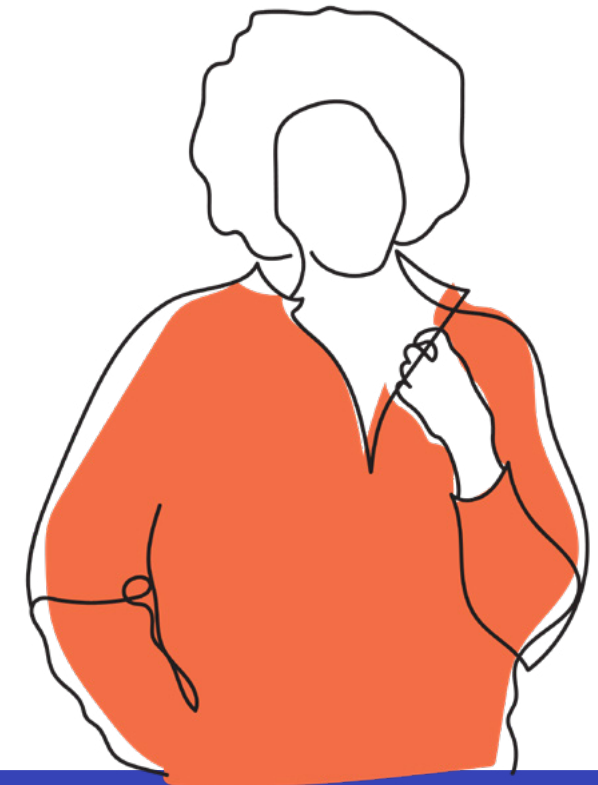
- Ensure that the knowledge gained from personal experience is used in a manner that contributes to the well-being of the peer and that the relationship is always peer-focused.

- Maintain mutually agreed upon limits and boundaries in the peer support relationship.

- Respect external limits and boundaries within the context of their role as a peer supporter.

- Practice self-care, monitor their own wellbeing and are aware of their own needs, as well as promote self-care for their peers.

- Play an active role in connecting peers to other resources and are open to seeking help when needed.

- Are collaborative with community partners, service providers and other stakeholders.

- Aspire to be current within their field of practice by remaining up-to-date regarding available resources, especially those that are locally available, and by engaging in continuous learning.

Evaluation of The Standards of Practice

The standards that must be met for certification as a peer supporter are detailed in this section. This includes an explanation as to what each standard is assessing, as well as how each standard will be assessed throughout the certification process. This section speaks specifically to what will be assessed and how it will be assessed. It is recommended that candidates review the Candidate Procedures section below in addition to this section to get a fulsome understanding of how candidates will be assessed during their participation in the certification program.

Lived/Living Experience

Peer supporters are expected to demonstrate that they have coped with (or continue to cope with) challenges that are similar to the challenges that they are supporting folks with and that they intentionally draw from this lived and living experience perspective in their work. This standard involves having lived with (or living with) a wellness related challenge such as a mental health or substance use health challenge either personally or as a family member/supporter. This standard also involves the demonstration of a positive state of recovery/wellness and a demonstrated readiness to support others.

The lived/living experience may be something that an individual has experienced or is experiencing personally, which allows them to proceed with applying for peer supporter certification. Or the experience may be in supporting a family member/loved one with a wellness related challenge, which allows them to proceed with applying for family peer supporter certification. Recovery and wellness are critical components of lived experience. The certification process will strive to ensure that the prospective peer supporter has reached a positive state of recovery and resiliency to support others coping with wellness related challenges. This is important for the sake of the supporter as well as the peers that they are supporting.

How will The Lived/Living Experience Standard be Assessed?

In alignment with peer support being a non-clinical and self-determined approach to wellness, the following aspects of the Lived/Living Experience Standard will be assessed through self-reported indicators in the application:

- Experience having lived or living with a wellness related challenge such as a mental health or substance use health challenge either personally or as a family member/supporter.

- Demonstration of a positive state of recovery/wellness.

- Demonstration of being in a place of readiness to support others coping with wellness related challenges such as a mental health or substance use health challenge, or to support other family members/supporters.

The expectation that candidates not only have lived/living experience but are capable of referring to their personal experiences and their recovery journey in a manner that models a sense of hope for themselves and others will be assessed within the Acquired Experience Standard, the Knowledge Standard, and the Competency Standard.

Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is rooted in the Core Values of peer support work and describes the behaviour expected of Certified Peer Supporters. To receive certification, candidates must commit to this code and will base their behaviour on these expectations. Candidates must demonstrate that they understand all aspects of the Code of Conduct and agree to act in accordance with this code while engaging in the practice of peer support. There is a hope that peer supporters who have received certification from Peer Support Canada will continue to work in alignment with the Code of Conduct beyond the certification process while they are working as peer supporters in the community.

The Code of Conduct reads as follows:

Code of Conduct

- I will act ethically, according to the values and principles of peer support
- I will treat all people with respect and dignity
- I will respect human diversity and will foster non-discriminatory activities
- I will honour the rights, beliefs, and personal values of individuals
- I will behave with honesty and integrity in providing support to peers
- I will respect the privacy of individuals and maintain confidentiality within the limitations of program policies and the law e.g., potential harm to self or others
- I will not knowingly expose a peer to harm
- I will not take advantage of the peer relationship for personal benefit, material, or financial gain
- I will respect the boundaries of peer support work and will not engage in romantic or sexual relationships with the peers that I support
- I will not provide peer support in a manner that negatively affects the public's confidence in peer support.

How will the Code of Conduct Standard be Assessed?

Candidates will be assessed on their understanding of and commitment to the Code of Conduct in two ways:

- Questions will be included in the written Knowledge Assessment that pertain to the Code of Conduct. Candidates will be graded on their ability to answer these questions correctly and a summary of their results on these questions will be shared within the Code of Conduct Standard section of their Final Assessment Report. (See Candidate Procedures section for more information on the Final Assessment Report).

- Questions will be asked within the verbal Competency Assessment that pertain to the Code of Conduct. Candidates will be assessed on their ability to respond to these questions in a way that demonstrates their alignment with the Code of Conduct. A summary of the results of this assessment will be shared within the Final Assessment Report.
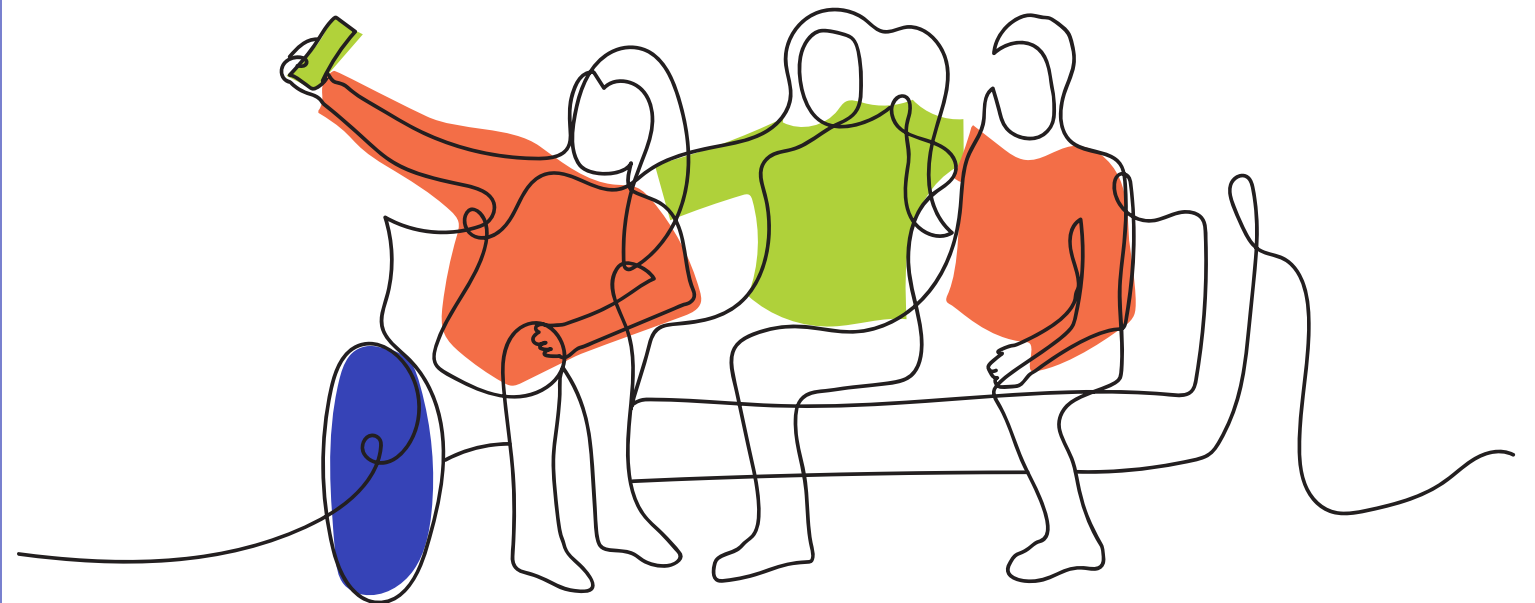
Knowledge Standard

The Knowledge Standard identifies the type of information that a Certified Peer Supporter will need to know to be fully prepared to do peer support work. This knowledge represents the theory learned from participation in a peer support training program and/or knowledge gained from experience as an active peer supporter.

A certified peer supporter and a certified family peer supporter will know:

Fundamental Concepts of Peer Support

- Understand the recovery paradigm and how to apply it
- Understand the key concept of self-determination and how to apply it
- Understand the basic principles of trauma informed care and how to apply it in practice
- Understand how the Peer Support Canada Values and Principles of Practice promote an authentic recovery-based peer support relationship

Historical and Social Context of Peer Support

- Be familiar with the historical context in which peer support has arisen
- Understand the effects of prejudice, discrimination, racism and stigma related to mental illness and addiction and ways to mitigate their impact
- Understand the social determinants of health and their impact on mental health and wellbeing
- Be familiar with the range of settings in which peer support may be offered, and understand how to be effective within the teams or workgroups of various workplace environments

Concepts and Methods to Promote Effective Peer Support Relationships

- Understand the principles of interpersonal communication and be familiar with methods which facilitate empathic communication
- Understand methods of building supportive, recovery-oriented peer support relationships
- Understand processes of recovery and change and the role of peer support in these processes
- Understand personal and role-oriented limits and boundaries in peer support and how to negotiate and communicate them
- Understand various types of crisis situations that peers may encounter and be familiar with strategies for supporting peers in crisis
- Be familiar with the elements of a self-care plan and understand the importance of having a self-care plan for themselves and their peers
- Understand how to support peers to identify their needs and rights to make informed choices in obtaining social support and advocacy services when necessary

How will the Knowledge Standard be Assessed?

Candidates will have many different opportunities to contribute to their Knowledge Standard score throughout the process, including in the application, the written Knowledge Assessment and verbal Competency Assessment.

Two questions in the application contribute to the overall Knowledge Standard score:

- As part of the Knowledge Standard, candidates are expected to be able to understand the concept of recovery/wellness from a peer support lens and apply it to their practice as a peer supporter. In 500 words or less, please explain what recovery/wellness means to you, and how you have used this understanding of recovery/wellness in your practice as a peer supporter?

- As part of the Knowledge Standard, candidates are expected to understand and be able to incorporate the values of peer support and how these values promote an authentic recovery-based peer support relationship. In 500 words or less, please explain your understanding of peer support, and how you have operated in alignment with 2–3 values of peer support in your practice as a peer supporter?

The majority of Knowledge Standard scores will be informed by responses provided in the written Knowledge Assessment. This written assessment involves true/false, short answer, scenario-based and multiple choice questions organized by the above-mentioned categories of knowledge that peer supporters are expected to understand. Candidates' written Knowledge Assessments will be internally graded, and scores will be allocated to the various sections of the Knowledge Standard.

There are also some questions in the verbal Competency Assessment that will contribute to a candidate's overall Knowledge Standard score.

A summary of the results from the Knowledge Standard questions in the application, the Knowledge Assessment and Competency Assessment will be shared within the Final Assessment Report.

Acquired Experience Standard

Note that this standard is only required for candidates applying for full certification (see provisional certification section above). This competency speaks to a candidate's previous experience providing formalized peer support services. Having formalized peer support experience means one has experience supporting peers in a manner that is consistent with the Peer Support Canada Core Values and Principles of Practice and means that one has achieved an awareness of how to use their skills and abilities in real situations. It involves intentionally pulling from personal lived and living experiences to support others with similar experiences. Formalized peer support experience involves prior training or some type of preparation, supervision, and job titles such as "peer supporter", "peer specialist", "peer mentor", or "workplace peer supporter."

To receive full certification, candidates must demonstrate that they have at least 200 hours of formalized peer support experience.

How Will the Acquired Experience Standard be Assessed?

For candidates applying for full certification, the Acquired Experience Standard will be assessed through the application. Candidates applying for full certification will be asked to share a description of their previous/current peer support roles. They will be asked to speak directly to how they use their lived and living experience within each of these roles. Peer Support Canada will assess the descriptions provided and work to evaluate whether this experience aligns with Peer Support Canada's definition of formalized peer support experience. Peer Support Canada may also choose to get in touch with the organizations where this peer support experience was completed to verify hours, and to gain a better understanding of the role. A summary of indicators noted by Peer Support Canada in relation to the acquired experience descriptions will be included within the Acquired Experience Standard section of the candidate's Final Assessment Report.

For candidates applying for provisional certification, this standard is not required. Those who receive provisional certification will have one year to upgrade to full certification. To upgrade, one would need to achieve and submit documentation of 200 hours of formalized peer support experience. Peer Support Canada will assess this previous experience in the same way that is assessed for full certification candidates.

Peer Supporter Competency Standard

A certified peer supporter is expected to be able to demonstrate skills and abilities within the following competencies:

- **Interpersonal Relations:** Interacts in a manner that honours the dignity of others and strives to build positive respectful relationships. Strives to make others feel comfortable and conveys genuine interest in their peer. Even in a difficult or tense situation strives to maintain a level of respect and consideration for the other.

- **Demeanour:** Is sensitive to what another might be feeling, demonstrates a capacity for nonjudgmental empathy, and responds from an equal, genuine, and sharing point of view. Selectively self-discloses own experience in a manner that ensures the relationship remains peer focused.

- **Communication:** Listens with empathy and without judgement, holding their peers in unconditional high regard. Uses communication styles and skills to improve understanding and adapts the style and tone of communication to suit the listener and the situation. Communicates using recovery language and emphasizes the strengths of their peers.

- **Flexibility & Adaptability:** Is open to new ideas, deals comfortably with ambiguity, and adjusts plans or behaviours to better suit a given situation. Is willing to be open-minded and compromises when needed.

- **Critical Thinking:** Engages in active listening skills to better understand a situation and recognizes that there is more than one way to look at an issue. Considers the possible implications or outcomes of their actions and, when asked, will help peers to explore the outcome or possible consequences of various options. Demonstrates good judgement in respecting the limits and boundaries of their role.

- **Hope:** Operates from a sense of hope expressing confidence that others will be successful in their own personal journeys of recovery. Strives to model realistic optimism and a belief that even in difficult situations positive choices can be made.

- **Self-Management & Resiliency:** Understands the importance of self-care and stress management and models the practices that work best for them to remain healthy while supporting others. Strives to maintain calm and diffuse stressful or challenging situations.

- **Teamwork:** Shares knowledge, ideas and resources with team members in a cooperative and collaborative manner. Strives to fulfill their role and responsibility within the team while respecting the roles and responsibilities of the other team members.

- **Self-Awareness & Confidence:** Interacts in a manner that demonstrates a balance of self-confidence with openness to the thoughts and opinions of others. Self-reflects and understands that personal thoughts and attitudes can influence their behaviour and actions.

- **Initiative & Commitment:** Is dependable and carries tasks through to completion. Demonstrates good judgement knowing when insight or assistance should be requested from another and are trustworthy when working independently.

- **Continuous Learning & Development:** Strives to approach life and work in a curious manner, identifies areas where personal growth may be helpful, and takes advantage of opportunities to learn and develop. Recognizes the value of on-going personal growth and skill development and maintains a connection with a peer support community as a resource to stay 'grounded' in the work of authentic peer support.

How Will the Peer Supporter Competency Standard be Assessed?

Candidates will be assessed on their ability to demonstrate the Competency Standard through the reference/self-assessment questionnaires and through the verbal Competency Assessment. In the application, candidates are asked to provide the contact information of two references whom they have asked permission to speak on behalf of their demonstration of the 11 competencies. If the candidate's application is accepted, PSC will send the reference assessment survey links to the two reference contacts, and will send a link to a self-assessment to the candidate to complete. A combination of these scores will contribute to the overall score of the Competency Standard.

In the verbal Competency Assessment, scenario-based and experiential questions will be asked that pertain to the peer supporter competencies. Candidates will be assessed on their ability to respond to these questions in a way that demonstrates the various competency indicators. Each candidate will be graded on their responses to the questions asked.

A summary of the results of the reference/self-assessments and the verbal Competency Assessment will be shared within the Competency Standard section of the Final Assessment Report.

Candidate Procedures for Certification

*Below is a breakdown of the certification process steps.*

(1) Step 1: Review Eligibility Requirements & Assess Readiness

Ahead of applying for certification, we **strongly** recommend interested applicants review the eligibility requirements listed below and conduct a personal readiness check to determine whether they are ready to apply for certification. Certification is an **assessment** of an individual's ability to demonstrate the required Standards of Practice, it is **not a training program**. This means there is an expectation that interested applicants have completed some form of peer support training and/or have learned through experience providing peer support services ahead of applying for certification with Peer Support Canada.

Personal Readiness Checklist

- Do you understand that the Peer Support Canada Certification Program is an assessment, and not a training program?

- Do you have 2 hours within the next four weeks to submit the application?

- Do you have 10–15 hours within the next 3–4 months to complete the certification assessment process?

- Do you understand that certification costs a total of $1200.00 and do you have an understanding as to whether you will be covering that cost independently, or your organization will be covering this cost?

- Do you currently feel prepared to write the written Knowledge Assessment?

- Do you currently feel prepared to complete the verbal Competency Assessment?

- Have you reviewed the National Standards of Practice and the Certification Handbook?

- Do you meet the following criteria:
  - Have lived/living experience of a mental wellness and/or substance use related health challenge (either personally or as a family member/supporter)
  - Be on a path of recovery and wellness.
  - Demonstrate a readiness to support others.
  - Possess values aligned with the Peer Support Canada Code of Conduct.
  - Have experience meeting the Standards of Practice.
 - Have at least 200 hours of providing formalized peer support (for full certification)

If "yes" to all the above, then you are ready to apply for certification!
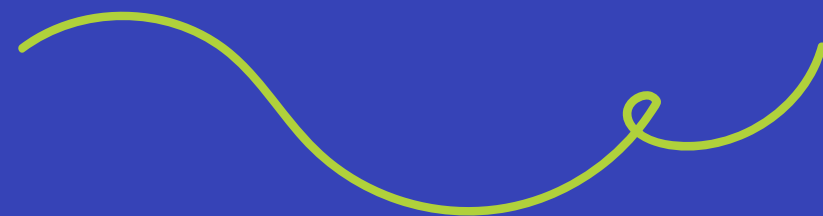
② Step 2: Create an Online PSC Portal Account

Interested applicants should go to www.pscportal.ca and create an online user account. This will be where the candidate completes all the steps associated with their certification process. The candidate will need to go through the portal to submit their application, submit payments, schedule and access their assessments, and review their application and certification results. Candidates will also be able to access their certificate/provisional certification letter through the online portal. Applicants will need to verify their email address prior to completing their Participant Profile.

Once an account has been created and the additional information is provided, the user will be emailed a confirmation email which contains their username and password. As Peer Support Canada grows and offers more services beyond certification, users will be able to access these services through the online portal.
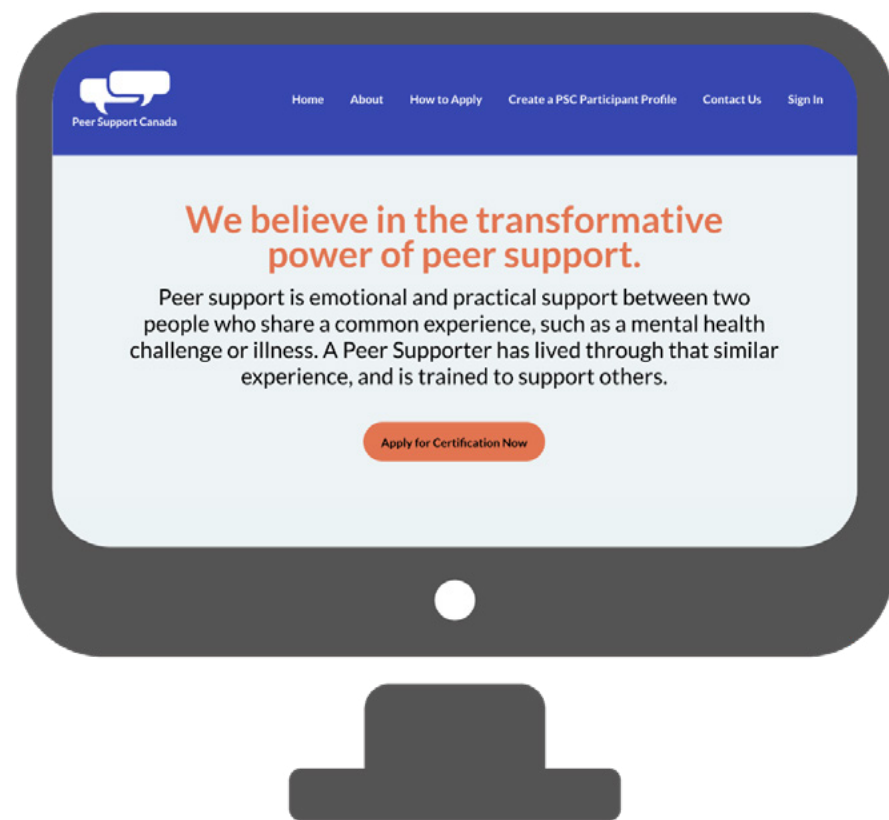
③ Step 3: Submit Application and Pay Application Fee

Next, applicants will select either the peer or family peer supporter certification application to begin. After completing the first page of the application, applicants will be emailed a link to their application and will have 28 days to complete and submit the application fee ($200.00) or the application will be auto closed. Each application page saves as you advance to the next page. Below are the sections of the application to complete:

Completion of Readiness Questions: a series of questions aiming to confirm applicants' understanding and expectations of the certification process. This includes questions pertaining to whether applicants are covering the cost of certification independently or if the organization that they work/volunteer for will be covering these costs. This section includes questions about whether the applicant is interested in applying for full or provisional certification (see provisional certification section below). This section also provides applicants with an opportunity to identify accommodations that they may need throughout the certification process.

Completion of Basic Understanding Questions: a series of questions aiming to assess applicants' basic understanding of the values of peer support and the concept of recovery/wellness, as well as an opportunity for applicants to share about their lived/living experience.

Completion of Previous Experience Questions: (Note that this section needs to be completed only by full certification applicants): an opportunity for applicants applying for full certification to share about their previous experience(s) offering formalized peer support. Applicants will be asked to describe their previous experience, and provide a contact for each organization.

Reference Contact Information: an opportunity for applicants to list 2 references that they would like to have speak to their ability to operate in alignment with the values of peer support, and their ability to demonstrate the required competencies. For applicants applying for full certification, at least one of these 2 references must be able to speak to the applicant's capacity within a formalized peer support role.

Once an application has been submitted and the application fee has been processed, Peer Support Canada will take 2–3 weeks to review. If the application is evaluated and PSC determines it meets the basic requirements, then PSC will reach out to the certification candidate's references to have them complete an online reference assessment survey and to the candidate to have them complete an online self-assessment survey. If there are no concerns noted within the reference assessment or the self-assessment, then the candidate's application for certification will be accepted.

④ Step 4: Pay Assessment Fee & Schedule Assessments

If an application is accepted, candidates will be asked to provide the assessment fee and to schedule their written Knowledge Assessment and their verbal Competency Assessment. Once the $1,000.00 assessment fee is paid, candidates will be brought to the page to schedule their assessments.

- Assessments must be scheduled at least two business days in advance to allow PSC staff time to complete the administrative work involved with facilitating assessments.
- The written Knowledge Assessment must be completed ahead of the verbal Competency Assessment.
- There must be at least a 3 week gap between the writing of the Knowledge Assessment and the completion of the verbal Competency Assessment. This 3-week gap allows PSC staff to review the

results of the Knowledge Assessment and ensure that questions are being asked within the Competency Assessment that speak specifically to areas for development gleaned from the Knowledge Assessment. If a scheduled Knowledge Assessment is missed, the Competency Assessment booking will be automatically cancelled and the candidate will be prompted to provide a reason for missing the assessment prior to rescheduling.

When scheduling assessments, the portal has been set up to abide by the above parameters.

Once assessments have been scheduled, candidates will receive an email confirming the dates and times of their assessments. Candidates will also be sent reminder emails notifying them of their upcoming assessments.

⑤ Step 5: Complete Knowledge Assessment and Competency Assessment

Written Knowledge Assessment Procedures

The written Knowledge Assessment is an exam designed to assess candidates' demonstration of the Knowledge Standard. This assessment also touches on the Code of Conduct (see Standards of Practice section above for a breakdown of how the Standards will be assessed).

As a reminder, the certification process is an **assessment**, not a training. To prepare for the Knowledge Assessment, candidates are encouraged to refer to the Knowledge and Code of Conduct Standards sections in this Certification Handbook to identify what knowledge will be assessed. Candidates are then encouraged to review their previous training materials and/or personal learnings to prepare for the assessment. The MHCC Guidelines for the Practice and Training of Peer Support (2013/2016) is also a good resource that sheds light on what knowledge will be assessed. The majority of the knowledge assessed is expected to have been gained from previous learning, including peer support training and/or peer support work or volunteer experience.

The assessment has a possible total of 100 points and consists of multiple choice, short answer, scenario and true/false questions. The written Knowledge Assessment is completed online.

On the scheduled day/time of a candidate's Knowledge Assessment they are expected to login to the zoom room through the online portal or by clicking the link in the confirmation email. When the candidate is in the zoom room, they will be sent the link to their online written Knowledge Assessment. The candidate must remain present within the zoom room for the duration of the assessment. Cameras are asked to remain on (with the exception of breaks). Within the zoom room, there will be up to 25 candidates present at one time each writing their own Knowledge Assessment.

The Knowledge Assessment takes on average 2–3 hours to complete, and the zoom sessions provide 4 hours total. There is an intentional 10-minute break at the halfway point, as well as candidates may take breaks during other parts of the assessment as needed. Candidates may leave the zoom room once they have completed their assessment.

A Certification Coordinator will be present during the assessment to take attendance, provide the housekeeping guidelines at the start, answer questions related to the examination process, provide technology assistance, and clarify the meaning of exam questions upon request. They will also provide optional group exercises (ex: 3-minute breathing exercise) with the intention of mitigating exam stress at the beginning and the halfway point of the session to which candidates are welcome to tune in or out, depending on their individual needs.

When developing the Knowledge Assessment protocols, we kept peers (service-delivery recipients) in mind. We believe in order to deliver effective peer support to our peers, a peer supporter will need to be able to demonstrate the Knowledge Standard. As such, we collectively are responsible for upholding the integrity of the Knowledge Assessment process. For this reason, the assessment is closed book, there are multiple assessment versions and a Certification Coordinator is present to facilitate.

While knowing that writing an assessment in a virtual room of other writers and a facilitator can feel unsettling, we have designed the assessment experience to strive to mitigate this sense of unease and to feel supportive for our candidates. Although candidates are writing on their own, we hope this collective experience supports candidates in feeling less isolated, calmer, and more connected to other peer support colleagues. We also invite any feedback on this aspect of the process through our feedback form.

Upon completion of the Knowledge Assessment, Peer Support Canada staff will review and summarize the feedback to include within the candidate's Final Assessment Report. Peer Support Canada staff will use the results of the Knowledge Assessment to inform what types of questions to ask in the Competency Assessment. Please note that Knowledge Assessment results will not be shared with candidates until the verbal Competency Assessment has also been completed. Overall results from both assessments will be shared in a summarized fashion at the end of the certification process in the Final Assessment Report.

Verbal Competency Assessment Procedures

The purpose of the verbal Competency Assessment is to assess a candidate's demonstration of the 11 core competencies as outlined in the Competency Standard section.

The Competency Assessment is a 1-hour conversation between the candidate and Certification Coordinator. In the notes section of the booking, candidates are encouraged to provide any information for the Certification Coordinator to know regarding their individual needs/what might make them feel more at ease and able to communicate their demonstration of the competencies effectively.

In advance of the assessment, candidates are asked to review the 11 core competencies and reflect on/write down examples of experiences with peers or others that reflect the demonstration of these competencies in action. Unlike the Knowledge Assessment, candidates are permitted to refer to their notes during the Competency Assessment.

At the time of assessment, the candidate and Certification Coordinator will connect to the zoom room with cameras on. As there is a lot of material to work through, candidates are encouraged to be as concise with their responses as possible.

The Certification Coordinator will ask scenario-based and experiential questions. Candidates pursuing full certification will be asked to provide examples of past or current peer support experiences to detail their answers. The Certification Coordinator will use a structured rubric to assess the candidate's demonstration of the competencies.

If the 1-hour assessment is complete and the Certification Coordinator feels they require more information from the candidate to proceed, an additional session may be requested.

6 Step 6: Await and Review Results

Peer Support Canada staff will compile the results of candidate's application, reference/self-assessments, Knowledge Assessment, and Competency Assessment. These results will be summarized into a Final Assessment Report including Pass/Fail and general comments per Standard. If candidates are successfully awarded certification, they will be notified through their online portal, and by email. This email will include the Final Assessment Report and either their certificate for full certification, or their letter for provisional certification. Candidates who receive full certification will also receive a mailed copy of their certificate, which will be sent to the mailing address Peer Support Canada has on file.

Additional Information Regarding the Certification Process

Overall Assessment Approach

Candidates are assessed through the application, reference/self-assessments, knowledge assessment and competency assessment. Each of these assessment methods contribute in different ways to a candidate's overall result in each of the 5 Standards of Practice (as outlined above).

The Final Assessment Report includes results per Standard; Pass/Fail and general comments outlining a candidate's demonstrated strengths and areas for development as gleaned from the various assessment methods. Numerical scores will not be used in the final report.

Submitting Payment

Payments can be made online by credit card. To submit an application, candidates will need to submit a credit card payment for the $200.00 application fee. To move on to the assessment portion of the certification program, candidates will need to submit a credit card payment for the $1000.00 assessment fee.

If a candidate's organization has agreed to cover the cost of their certification, they are welcome to arrange with the organization to either use their personal credit card and be reimbursed by their organization internally or use the organization's company credit card. We strongly encourage candidates to ensure this arrangement is understood and agreed upon prior to submitting payment.

Missed/Failed Assessments

Candidates are assessed against the five Standards of Practice by means of the application, reference/self-assessments and Knowledge and Competency Assessments cumulatively. If a candidate reaches the end of the process and it is determined that they do not demonstrate the required Standards of Practice, the candidate will receive an email from PSC indicating that they have not been successful, sharing their assessment results, and providing suggested guidance on next steps if they wish to try again at a later date. As organizational resources are used to process applications and assessments, we are unable to issue refunds to unsuccessful applicants/candidates.

Candidates can re-schedule their Knowledge Assessment or Competency Assessment one week prior to their scheduled date. If an exceptional circumstance arises less than one week before the scheduled assessment, the candidate must inform the PSC Coordinator to reschedule their assessment. If a candidate misses a scheduled assessment without any notice, they will be emailed and requested to provide a reason within 2 weeks. Failure to provide this will result in a closure of the candidate's application. As in this process we assess for competencies such as communication, initiative and commitment, we have created these parameters around missed assessments.

Provisional and Full Certification

As mentioned within the "Summary of the 2022 – 2023 Review and Updates" section above, provisional certification is now available to applicants who can demonstrate all required Standards except for Acquired Experience. (Please review descriptions of the Acquired Experience Standard above).

We encourage interested applicants who may have completed peer support training and/or engaged in informal peer support roles to apply for provisional certification. This is a great opportunity to be assessed by Peer Support Canada, have Peer Support Canada (hopefully) determine the candidate meets all required Standards except for Acquired Experience. Provisional certification is likely to be an asset to employers and/or organizations looking for volunteers and will allow provisionally certified folks time to acquire the hours necessary to have their certification upgraded to full.

Please note that an applicant may apply for full certification, and Peer Support Canada will evaluate the documentation provided around the previous peer support work/volunteer experience. If Peer Support Canada determines the candidate's previous experience does not qualify as formalized peer support experience, or if the candidate has not yet been able to build up 200 hours of experience, then the candidate will be approved for provisional certification (so long as the rest of the basic requirements are met). If a candidate feels as though they do in fact have at least 200 hours of formalized peer support experience, then they are encouraged to go through the remainder of the process and then submit their hours at the end. Again, Peer Support Canada will evaluate this previous experience (and the updated descriptions provided) and will upgrade a candidate's certification to full if it is determined that the candidate's experience equates to at least 200 hours of formalized peer support experience.

For those who have achieved provisional certification and wish to upgrade to full, they will need to contact certification@peersupportcanada.ca for the Acquired Experience form to complete.

Appeals

The following appeals process has been established to provide candidates going through the certification program with the opportunity to appeal a decision made that directly impacts whether they receive certification with Peer Support Canada. The appeals process is *not* an opportunity for candidates to introduce *new information* to their application or assessment responses. Rather, it is an opportunity for **an additional external perspective** (the Certification Committee members) to evaluate the **same information**. To add new information to an application or to be re-assessed, candidates must reapply for certification.

Candidates who are pursuing certification with Peer Support Canada either as a Certified Peer Supporter, or a Certified Family Peer Supporter can submit an appeal. Candidates applying for either full certification or provisional certification can submit an appeal.

All certification decisions are made by Peer Support Canada staff. In the interest of mitigating bias in the appeals process, all appeals will be facilitated via the Certification Committee. The PSC Certification Committee is a volunteer committee made up of individuals who have extensive experience with the certification process themselves, and/or are deeply familiar with the required Standards of Practice for Peer Supporters. The PSC Certification Committee is responsible for reviewing the appeal, collecting relevant information, analyzing the required standards, and making recommendations to PSC staff with regards to the outcome of an appeal. PSC staff decide the outcome of each appeal, based on the recommendations from the Certification Committee.

There are two opportunities in which a candidate can appeal a decision made by Peer Support Canada:

- Upon the decision that their application for certification will not be accepted
- Upon the decision that their assessment results indicate they do not demonstrate the required standards for peer support service provision and they will therefore not be granted certification

After receiving the notification that their application has been declined or that they did not pass the assessment, the candidate is encouraged to first review the comments provided by PSC staff and to take some time to reflect (perhaps a day or two). Please note that often the Certification Committee's recommendations will include pursuing further peer support training/learning development prior to re-applying. If after some reflection, the candidate strongly feels that their application or assessment responses do adequately demonstrate the required Standards of Practice, they are welcome to submit an appeal.

When candidates are notified of either of the above scenarios, an "appeal" button will appear on their "Active and Past Certifications" page of their online profile. They will be able to use this button to appeal either of the above decisions. Appeals will be submitted directly to Peer Support Canada's Certification Committee. Appeals must be submitted by candidates within 15 days of a decision having been made by Peer Support Canada staff.

From here, the following steps will be taken:

1. The Certification Committee members will review the submitted Certification Appeal Form and the candidate's certification documents to date.
2. The Certification Committee will notify the candidate within 2 weeks that they have received the completed Certification Appeal Form and will provide an accurate timeline of when the candidate can expect to hear back with next steps. The Certification Committee may choose to connect further with the candidate either via email, Zoom or phone call to seek further clarification prior to making their decision. *Remember: It is the interpretation of the current information that is up for debate; this is not an opportunity to provide different answers.*
3. Based on the information provided measured against the 5 Standards of Practice, the Certification Committee will provide their recommendation to PSC staff

regarding the appeal outcome. Potential recommendations include:
- Application should be accepted
- Application should be declined
- Certification should be granted
- Certification should not be granted
4. PSC staff will review the recommendation from the Certification Committee and will decide.
5. PSC staff will communicate the final decision to the candidate with the Certification Committee members informed. This final decision will include strengths-based feedback, supporting evidence/information that was used to make the decision, an explanation about how this information was analyzed to inform the decision reached, and potentially suggested next steps for the candidate.

Application Appeals must be responded to by PSC staff within **30 days** of the appeal being submitted.

Assessment Appeals must be responded to by PSC staff within **45 days** of the appeal being submitted.

Certificate and Provisional Letter

Candidates that are awarded full certification will be provided with a certificate indicating that they have been awarded the designation of Certified Peer Supporter or Certified Family Peer Supporter. This certificate will be made available through their online profile and will be emailed to them. A hard copy of the certificate will also be mailed to candidates.

Candidates that are awarded provisional certification will be provided a letter indicating that they have been awarded provisional certification (either as a Peer Supporter or a Family Peer Supporter). This letter will be made available through their online profile and will be emailed to them. When a candidate demonstrates the required hours to have their provisional certification upgraded to full certification, at that point in time the certificate of completion will be uploaded online, and a hard copy of this certificate will be mailed.

Confidentiality Within the Certification Process

To view the full CMHA National Privacy Policy, please click this link.

A section of this privacy policy relates specifically to how we manage candidates' confidential information at Peer Support Canada: If you choose to apply for certification with Peer Support Canada, we collect additional information in support of your certification and involvement in the program. In order to apply to this program, we will ask you to confirm whether you have "lived experience" in terms of mental health or substance use health challenges and feel that you are on a path of recovery and wellness. We do not require specific details of such experience. We will also ask you for your experience in the delivery of peer support in the

past. This information is used to validate your application against the eligibility criteria at the start of the program. The information provided in your application will be kept confidential within the Peer Support Canada Certification Program and the Peer Support Canada Certification Committee.

Essentially, all information that we collect as part of the certification process is kept confidential. Peer Support Canada staff review this information to evaluate your application and your assessment results. The Certification Committee is privy to this information in the case that you choose to appeal a decision that was made.

Peer Support Canada
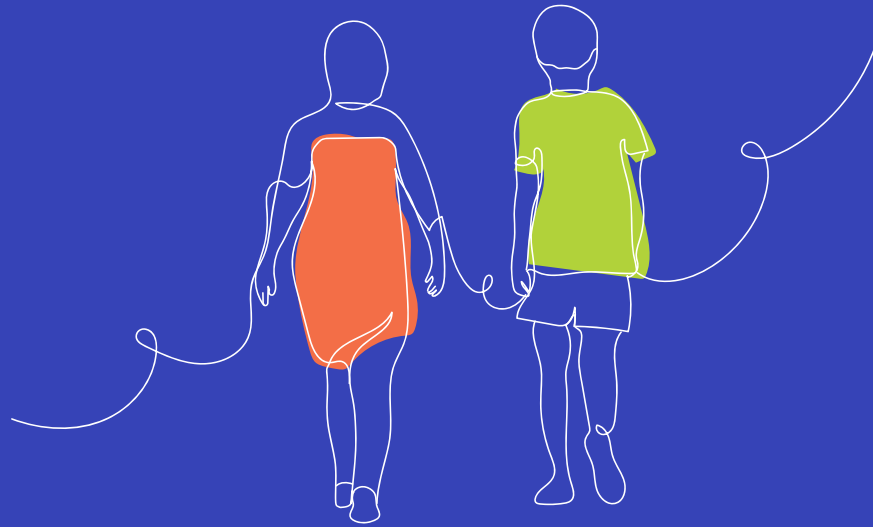
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