

## Transcom Brief: Certified Peer Specialists

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**Transformation Committee (Transcom)** <http://www.mass-smhpc.org/council-subcommittees/transcom/>

*Transcom's Certified Peer Specialist (CPS) Brief provides guidance necessary for implementing peer support in mental health, trauma and healthcare services. Transcom is a subcommittee of the MA State Mental Health Planning Council. We are a coalition that builds consensus and strengthens person-driven and sustainable services. Our priority is to protect and expand the peer support workforce, including CPSs, Peer Recovery Coaches, and Young Adult Peer Mentors.*

### **Certified Peer Specialist Role and Settings**

CPSs share their lived experience of mental health recovery and resilience as a means to inspire hope and the courage to act. They support people to pursue their unique healing pathways in settings including: inpatient, respite, emergency and community services, prevention and Recovery Learning Communities (RLCs). CPSs are professionals who:

- Support individuals to establish community connections, navigate systems, self-advocate, explore healing opportunities, and identify and practice personal self-care strategies.
- Engage with colleagues as change agents who advocate for high quality and accessible services.
- Advance in a peer support career ladder in roles such as supervisor, trainer, manager, and administrator.
- Perform work that promotes mutuality, which is central to the efficacy of the role and is supported by the Massachusetts CPS Code of Ethics. Tasks that undermine mutuality include: documentation in treatment or service notes, overseeing adherence to medication or medical activities, serving as a payee, providing custodial care or clerical functions, transportation or accompaniment outside of an intentional peer support relationship.

### **Training the Certified Peer Specialist Workforce**

In 2004 the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services funded the startup of CPS training and certification in Massachusetts. Since 2006, the Department of Mental Health (DMH) has sponsored the CPS training and facilitated CPS role implementation within healthcare systems. Currently:

- The Transformation Center provides CPS training with funding from the Commonwealth. Go to [www.transformation-center.org](http://www.transformation-center.org) for policies and available training. People seeking CPS certification are encouraged to secure peer support experience and employment in a peer support role before training.
- The Massachusetts CPS Code of Ethics calls for CPSs to keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to recovery and peer support.
- Policies for appropriate CPS supervisor training and continuing education are in development.

### **Transcom's View of the Commonwealth's Certified Peer Specialist Workforce**

We are pleased that DMH and MassHealth are invested in this workforce. Transcom observes that meaningful outcomes emerge from fidelity to the CPS function, which achieves these outcomes by emphasizing voice, choice and mutuality.

Transcom urges fidelity through:

- Standardization of the CPS role and of the established CPS Code of Ethics within the field and across settings.
- Appropriately trained CPS Supervisors, non-clinical supervision and regular contact with CPS colleagues.
- Proactive strategies that integrate CPSs within agencies and systems to promote understanding and respect for their distinct and complementary non-clinical role.
- Continuing education that is required and strengthens the peer support career ladder.
- Consistent evaluation and accountability for the implementation of the above components of the CPS workforce.

### **Future of the Certified Peer Specialist Workforce**

Provider readiness is imperative to sustain quality CPS services, fidelity to the model, mutuality and worker satisfaction. Implementation without leadership compromises the value of the CPS workforce, while well-informed implementation, ongoing education, and qualified supervision are key to staff longevity and success over time. Organizations and systems need to:

- Ensure CPSs are trained and working toward a state-recognized CPS credential, supervised by trained CPS Supervisors, adhere to the established Code of Ethics, and engage in continuing education specific to peer support.
- Provide CPSs opportunities for professional growth that preserve the non-clinical, non-case management nature of the CPS role and that are integrated into the agency structure.
- Employ strategies that ensure a diverse workforce to address race and health equity and access among underserved, underrepresented and marginalized communities.
- Guarantee that CPS reimbursements enable Certified Peer Specialists to earn a decent wage.

Together, state agencies, providers, community groups, faith-based organizations, and CPSs can strengthen and expand a quality CPS workforce, offering mutual peer support as an integral component within all healthcare services.