

## **Ohio Expands Peer Support Certifications to Help People in Recovery from Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders**

*New Family and Youth Peer Support Added and Online Application Process Made Easier*

(COLUMBUS, OH) –The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS), in partnership with Governor Mike DeWine’s [RecoveryOhio initiative](#), today announced [recent rule changes have](#) created two new types of certified peer supporters – Certified Youth Peer Supporters who specialize in youth and young adults and Certified Family Peer Supporters who specialize in helping families navigate Ohio’s treatment and recovery support services systems, to help provide guidance to those recovering from mental illness and substance use disorders. A third category, Adult Certified Peer Recovery Supporter, already exists.

“Ohio is committed to helping youth, adults, and families impacted by mental illness and substance use disorders find pathways to recovery so they can live up to their full potential. Through OhioMHAS and the RecoveryOhio initiative, our top priority remains making help more visible, accessible, and effective in communities throughout Ohio,” said Ohio Governor Mike DeWine. “The expansion of family and youth peer support will help even more Ohioans as supporters share their lived experiences and offer guidance through the recovery process.”

Under the DeWine Administration, the use of peer supporters in recovery settings has grown significantly in Ohio. In fact, supporting and expanding the role of peer support specialists was a key recommendation in the [RecoveryOhio Advisory Council’s Initial Report](#) published in March 2019. OhioMHAS has committed significant resources to help recruit and train peer support staff to work alongside counselors and other behavioral healthcare professionals to help increase the odds of success for Ohioans seeking help for mental illness or addiction. Since 2016, more than 3,000 Ohioans have successfully completed training to become peer supporters. In addition, OhioMHAS has hosted nearly 150 trainings since SFY 2019.

“Having a peer supporter walk with you through your recovery journey is one of the best tools you can have,” said RecoveryOhio Director Aimee Shadwick. “By sharing their own lived experience and practical guidance, peer support workers help people to develop goals, create strategies for self-empowerment, and take concrete steps towards building fulfilling, self-determined lives for themselves.”

Peer support encompasses a range of non-clinical activities and interactions between people who share similar experiences of being diagnosed or caring for loved ones with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, or both. Peer supporters work in a variety of settings, such as treatment centers, hospitals, jails, veteran’s homes, recovery housing, and as part of crisis response teams where they work alongside first responders and behavioral health professionals. The new Youth and Family classifications are the result of a change in Ohio Administrative Code rules governing peer support staff.

“Peer supporters are people who have been successful in their own recovery process and are now helping others successfully navigate the road to recovery,” said OhioMHAS Director Lori Criss. “Given their lived experiences, peer supporters are uniquely qualified to help others struggling with mental illness and addiction successfully find their own pathways to wellness and lasting recovery.”

Peer support workers engage in a wide range of activities. These may include:

- Advocating for people in recovery
- Sharing resources and building skills
- Building community and relationships
- Leading recovery groups
- Mentoring and setting goals
- Providing services and/or training
- Supervising other peer workers
- Developing resources
- Administering programs or agencies
- Educating the public and policymakers

To be eligible to become a certified peer supporter, a person must be in recovery\* and have at least a high school diploma or GED. Candidates must also satisfactorily complete both an Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation and FBI background check.

OhioMHAS also announced that Ohio has streamlined the certification process by moving the application process to a digital e-Licensure platform. Not only will this expedite the process for applicants, but it will also allow state officials to better manage, analyze and track Ohio’s peer workforce.

“We’re committed to constantly evaluating, improving, and modernizing Ohio’s behavioral health workforce, and peer support is an important part of that work as it provides fulfilling professional opportunities and career pathways for those who become certified,” added Criss.

In a related development, the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction is using peer support in behavioral health and recovery services programs through an innovative collaboration with Ohio MHAS. Eligible incarcerated participants receive 56 hours of peer training to provide peer led services and supports to other incarcerated individuals. Although participants are not technically eligible to become certified while in prison, they may apply for certification upon release, according to the guidelines for peer certification in Ohio. In addition to providing a sense of purpose and direction to participants, the goal of the program is to provide pathways to meaningful employment upon release. The program is operational in six correctional facilities with the intention to expand statewide. So far, the program has trained 85 individuals.

“The peer support program embodies one of the core values of our agency – giving hope to those who live in our prisons,” stated ODRC Director Annette Chambers-Smith. “Incarcerated individuals have lived experience that gives them the foundation to be very effective as peer supporters. Their stories truly help others in recovery, and this training program will bolster their skills to share what they have learned.”

***\*NOTE: Only adult and youth certified peer supporters must be in recovery. For family supporters, the lived-experience is focused on systems navigation as a caregiver of a person with MH/SUD.***

# # #

Click [HERE](#) for a fact sheet about peer services in Ohio and [HERE](#) to read testimonials from current peer supporters. Learn more about peer support services on the [OhioMHAS website](#).