

IRIS Recovery Research Fellowship Project Write Up
“Requirements for Peers to Become Certified in States Across the Country –
Where Does Maryland Stand?”
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Introduction

The state of Maryland has six requirements to be eligible to take the Certified Peer Recovery Specialist (CPRS) exam. The state requires 46 Continuing Education Units (CEUs), 10 in the Advocacy domain, 16 in the Ethics Domain, 10 in the Mentoring/Education Domain and 10 in the Recovery and Wellness Domain. Each applicant must have 500 hours in the role of a Peer, as well as 25 hours of supervision by a Registered Peer Supervisor. Applicants must be 18 years of age or older, possess a high school diploma/GED and have 24 months in behavioral health recovery. The last requirement can be waived for applicants that identify as family members or allies to those in recovery. These requirements are stringent and require a substantial commitment from the applicant, sometimes which goes beyond the capacity of prospective CPRSs, based on other responsibilities and life circumstances. This creates barriers and challenges to earn this credential, which can make it inaccessible to peers who would provide great benefit to others in or seeking recovery. In an effort to address these challenges, this study aims to identify what types of peer certification requirements exist in other states so that Maryland may apply such practices or policies that would make its process more accessible, less burdensome, and ultimately more effective.

Method

A review of academic and “grey” literature was conducted, including through searches for comparisons of credentialing requirements by state. Two primary studies were identified that served as the main knowledge sources for this article, both which presented analyses of peer certification processes across states. A third core study was integrated into this research, which was a survey of Maryland peers around various aspects of their work experience, including the certification process. Integrated into the current analysis was a review of the current website of the Maryland Addiction & Behavioral Health Professionals Board (MABPCB), which is responsible for administering the peer certification process to see what changes were implemented based in part on peer survey feedback. In this way, the study compares Maryland’s certification requirements to other states, integrating the peer experience of this process and responses taken to expressed concerns.

Results

The United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) undertook a research study in 2018 presenting “Leading Practices for State Programs to Certify Peer Support Specialists” (<https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-41>). The six leading practices they reported on were a

systematic screening of applicants, conducting core trainings in person, incorporating physical health and wellbeing into the training and/or continuing education, preparing organizations to effectively use peers, have CEU requirements specific to peer support, and engaging peers in the leadership and development of the certification programs. This study looked at six states: Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Texas. These states were chosen based on recommendations from the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and other leading practice and research organizations. States were selected based on having an established peer certification program, receiving a block grant from SAMHSA, and to provide geographic diversity.

The GAO study conclusion was that the process of certification can be broken down into meeting the screening requirements, meeting the training requirements and meeting the certification requirements. Regarding the screening requirements, five of the six states required applicants to have a high school diploma or equivalent. All six states required lived experience with behavioral health (whether it be mental health or substance use), and that the applicant had experienced some time in recovery. Three of the six states required relevant work or volunteer experience ranging from 500 hours to 12 months, and three states required letters of recommendation. The examination of training requirements found all six states required at least 40 hours of core curriculum while two states required 70 hours or greater. Four of the six states had a single core curriculum training while two states allowed applicants to choose from approved vendors. The analysis of certification requirements found that all six states had a single statewide exam while two states required that applicants pass a state-approved training vendor's exam. All six states required applicants to sign a code of ethics. Three of the six states required certification to be renewed every 1-3 years. Five of the six states required continuing education ranging from 10-30 hours per year.

In the current study's review of the GAO research and a comparison with Maryland's requirements, the conclusion was that the credentialing requirements here are in accordance with practices and guidelines of other states, at least these six.

The Peer Recovery Center for Excellence presented a research study in July of 2021 - Comparative Analysis of State Requirements for Peer Support Specialist Training and Certification (insert website here). A vast analysis of state requirements throughout the country was undertaken and found that three states required less than 40 CEUs, 32 states required 40-50 CEUs, 16 states required 50-80 CEUs and three states required 80+ CEUs. There were 31 states that did not require work experience while four states required less than 200 hours, 4 states required between 200-499 hours, 11 states required 500-999 hours, and five states required more than 1,000 hours. In looking at the supervision required by different states, there was a large discrepancy between the qualifications necessary to provide supervision hours to applicants. Only 11 states have this information readily available on their website. This research study is more timely than the GAO study described above, and is evidence that while requirements are still not uniform, the leading practices discussed are still the current best practice.

Discussion

These two research studies lead to the conclusion that with various ranges of CEU, training and supervision hours required for peer certification across the states, Maryland generally falls directly in the middle. So how do peers in Maryland feel about the credentialing process?

In 2021, the University of Maryland Baltimore (UMB) Systems Evaluation Center for the Behavioral Health Administration in collaboration with University of Maryland Training Center conducted a Peer Recovery Specialist Survey for Peers in the State of Maryland (<https://health.maryland.gov/bha/Documents/Peer%20Recovery%20Specialists%20Survey%20Report%202021%20-%20FINAL.pdf>). This survey examined peers' work environments, job satisfaction and career development in great depth. The survey also addressed the credentialing requirements in the state. Responses results for the question related to "Most significant barriers to certification," were: lack of financial incentive or perceived value (42%), lack of training in specific domains (39%), cost (36%), lack of access to training (36%), process too confusing to navigate (33%), takes too much time (23%), lack of available Registered Peer Supervisors (21%), lack of support within my employing organization (15%), no employment opportunities available (14%) and transportation to trainings (13%) Timely communication related to the application was also voiced as a concern though the open-ended question related to the certification process "What changes would you make to the Maryland Peer Recovery Specialist Certification process".

The results of this survey have been incorporated into the peer workforce certification process in Maryland in many different ways. The Maryland Addiction & Behavioral Health Professionals Board (MABPCB) used survey results to implement some significant changes to their application to address peers' concerns. In February 2022, a new website was launched to allow the application process to be completed online. This also allowed for the supervision requirement as well as the reference letters to be completed via email, shortening the length of time in gathering this information. The online application has significantly shortened the time between submission and a date to take the exam. The new website version still allows for a search on credentials by name and by type of credential as well.

While some of the concerns expressed through the Peer Recovery Specialist Survey have been addressed, the peer workforce is still left with issues that need to be addressed. The lack of perceived value or financial incentive is not an issue that the MABPCB can address on its own. Advocacy efforts are needed to all levels of government in order to achieve this objective.