

Washington's Health Workforce SENTINEL NETWORK

Findings Brief: Peer Counselors

Spring 2026

This brief summarizes workforce needs reported to the Health Workforce Sentinel Network by Washington facilities that employ peer counselors during **April/May 2026**. More findings are available at wa.sentinelnetwork.org/findings.

Of all employer respondents in Spring 2026, 26 (16.6%) reported employing peer counselors.

Does your organization employ peer counselors?



Respondents were asked five questions about peer counselors they employ. Responding facility types included:

- Behavioral health agency - WA DOH certified
- Behavioral health clinic or practice
- Freestanding evaluation & treatment facility
- Other outpatient behavioral health organization
- Psychiatric/substance use treatment hospital or psychiatric unit in a hospital
- Secure withdrawal management facility
- Substance use disorder residential treatment facility
- Acute care hospital (more than 25 beds)
- Acute care hospital (25 beds or fewer)
- Federally qualified health center (FQHC) or community clinic providing care free or on sliding fee scale
- Primary care medical clinic (not FQHC/community clinic or rural health clinic)
- Public health organization
- Rural health clinic

Questions about Peer Counselors

Peer counselors perform a range of duties in supporting clients and communities. Respondents employing peer counselors indicated that peer counselors use their lived experience to support recovery, engagement, self-advocacy, service navigation, and achievement of behavioral health goals. Examples include:

- *[Behavioral health agency] Scheduled activities that promote recovery, self-advocacy, development of natural supports, and maintenance of community living skills for individuals with mental health conditions; assist in creation of recovery goals; use lived experience to support and encourage clients.*
- *[Behavioral health clinic] They walk alongside the person we serve in their recovery journey.*
- *[Behavioral health agency] We use peer counselors in two areas: an adult day program where they provide programming, daily task assistance, social interactions, mealtime, and other help with daily living; on our WISE team where they assist families in meeting the goals set through the WISE program.*

Questions about Peer Counselors

When asked “Within the past year, has your organization experienced challenges with employees receiving the new certified peer support specialist or trainee specialist credential from the Department of Health?” less than half of respondents who employ peer counselors answered “yes.” Examples of “yes” responses include:

- *[Behavioral health agency] DOH is behind in credentialing. I have two employees that applied for the new Certified peer support specialists credential in January 2026 and still pending after 4 months...*
- *[Behavioral health agency] Long waits to receive training and significant DOH delays in processing applications.*
- *[Multiple behavioral health facilities] The state loves to set requirements for the role but does not increase avenues of access for staff or providers to achieve these standards.*

When asked “Have you had any challenges providing an approved supervisor for certified peer support specialist trainees? (This is supervision for the purposes of meeting the 1000 supervised hour requirement for trainees to qualify for the CPSS credential, not general supervision).” approximately three-quarters of respondents employing peer counselors answered “no.” When asked to “describe how your organization achieved the supervisor requirement”, examples of responses include:

- *[Behavioral health agency] We have a large number of peers, many with long-term extensive experience with our organization. One is a trainer, certified by the state to provide the new peer training. A second Peer Supervisor has nearly completed the process.*
- *[Behavioral health agency] Peers have been a part of our organization for over a decade. Providing supervision for these positions has been a part of our treatment model for a long time.*

When asked “What types of trainings or technical assistance would support you in maintaining or growing your organization’s peer program? (e.g. Medicaid documentation requirements for peer services, ethics and boundaries in peer support, supervising peer support specialists, peer scope of practice, recruiting and hiring and retention),” respondents felt current peer training opportunities are adequate, but highlighted needs related to peer scope of practice, supervision, recruitment and retention, Medicaid documentation, and access to required HCA trainings. Examples of responses include:

- *[Behavioral health clinic] Training and technical assistance that would support our peer program include workforce development, supervision models, and program integration. Specifically, we would benefit from guidance on peer role clarity and boundaries, effective supervision structures for peer staff, and strategies to integrate peers into multidisciplinary teams.*
- *[Behavioral health agency] Type of trainings or technical assistance would include supervisor training and peer scope of practice.*
- *[Behavioral health agency] Ongoing community trainings and on-site availability for free trainings, more availability of peer certification classes.*

About the Washington Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The Sentinel Network links the healthcare sector with policymakers, workforce planners and educators to identify and respond to changing demand for healthcare workers, with a focus is on identifying newly emerging skills and roles required by employers. The Sentinel Network is an initiative of Washington's Health Workforce Council, conducted collaboratively by Washington's Workforce Board and the University of Washington's Center for Health Workforce Studies. Funding to initiate the Sentinel Network came from the Healthier Washington initiative, with ongoing support from the Washington State Legislature.

Why become a Sentinel? As a Sentinel, you can:

- Communicate your organization's workforce needs to inform policy and planning responses.
- Have access to current and actionable information about emerging healthcare workforce needs.
- Compare your organization's experience and emerging workforce demand trends with similar employer groups.

To view an interactive summary of findings and to provide information from your organization:

<https://wa.sentinelnetwork.org/>.

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