

Chapter 18.420 RCW
CERTIFIED PEER SPECIALISTS

Sections

18.420.005	Finding—Intent.
18.420.010	Definitions.
18.420.020	Authority of secretary.
18.420.030	Representation as certified peer specialist.
18.420.040	Exemptions from chapter.
18.420.050	Certification requirements.
18.420.060	Certification requirements—Trainee.
18.420.070	Examination.
18.420.080	Renewal of certificate.
18.420.090	Application of uniform disciplinary act.
18.420.800	Report—Supervisor supply adequacy.

RCW 18.420.005 Finding—Intent. (1) The legislature finds that peers play a critical role along the behavioral health continuum of care, from outreach to treatment to recovery support. Peers deal in the currency of hope and motivation and are incredibly adept at supporting people with behavioral health challenges on their recovery journeys. Peers represent the only segment of the behavioral health workforce where there is not a shortage, but a surplus of willing workers. Peers, however, are presently limited to serving only medicaid recipients and working only in community behavioral health agencies. As a result, youth and adults with commercial insurance have no access to peer services. Furthermore, peers who work in other settings, such as emergency departments and behavioral health urgent care, cannot bill insurance for their services.

(2) Therefore, it is the intent of the legislature to address the behavioral health workforce crisis, expand access to peer services, eliminate financial barriers to professional licensing, and honor the contributions of the peer profession by creating the profession of certified peer specialists. [2023 c 469 s 1.]

RCW 18.420.010 Definitions. The definitions in this section apply throughout this chapter unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

(1) "Advisory committee" means the Washington state certified peer specialist advisory committee established under *section 4 of this act.

(2) "Approved supervisor" means:

(a) Until July 1, 2028, a behavioral health provider, as defined in RCW 71.24.025 with at least two years of experience working in a behavioral health practice that employs peer specialists as part of treatment teams; or

(b) A certified peer specialist who has completed:

(i) At least 1,500 hours of work as a fully certified peer specialist engaged in the practice of peer support services, with at least 500 hours attained through the joint supervision of peers in conjunction with another approved supervisor; and

(ii) The training developed by the health care authority under RCW 71.24.920.

(3) "Certified peer specialist" means a person certified under this chapter to engage in the practice of peer support services.

(4) "Certified peer specialist trainee" means an individual working toward the supervised experience and written examination requirements to become a certified peer specialist under this chapter.

(5) "Department" means the department of health.

(6) "Practice of peer support services" means the provision of interventions by either a person in recovery from a mental health condition or substance use disorder, or both, or the parent or legal guardian of a youth who is receiving or has received behavioral health services. The client receiving the interventions receives them from a person with a similar lived experience as either a person in recovery from a mental health condition or substance use disorder, or both, or the parent or legal guardian of a youth who is receiving or has received behavioral health services. The person provides the interventions through the use of shared experiences to assist a client in the acquisition and exercise of skills needed to support the client's recovery. Interventions may include activities that assist clients in accessing or engaging in treatment and in symptom management; promote social connection, recovery, and self-advocacy; provide guidance in the development of natural community supports and basic daily living skills; and support clients in engagement, motivation, and maintenance related to achieving and maintaining health and wellness goals.

(7) "Secretary" means the secretary of health. [2023 c 469 s 2.]

***Reviser's note:** 2023 c 469 s 4, which established the Washington state certified peer specialist advisory committee, was vetoed by the governor.

RCW 18.420.020 Authority of secretary. In addition to any other authority, the secretary has the authority to:

(1) Adopt rules under chapter 34.05 RCW necessary to implement this chapter;

(2) Establish all certification, examination, and renewal fees for certified peer specialists in accordance with RCW 43.70.110 and 43.70.250;

(3) Establish forms and procedures necessary to administer this chapter;

(4) Issue certificates to applicants who have met the education, training, and examination requirements for obtaining a certificate and to deny a certificate to applicants who do not meet the requirements;

(5) Coordinate with the health care authority to confirm an applicants' successful completion of the certified peer specialist education course offered by the health care authority under RCW 71.24.920 and successful passage of the associated oral examination as proof of eligibility to take a qualifying written examination for applicants for obtaining a certificate;

(6) Establish practice parameters consistent with the definition of the practice of peer support services;

(7) Provide staffing and administrative support to the *advisory committee;

(8) Determine which states have credentialing requirements equivalent to those of this state, and issue certificates to applicants credentialed in those states without examination;

(9) Define and approve any supervised experience requirements for certification;

(10) Assist the *advisory committee with the review of peer counselor apprenticeship program applications in the process of being approved and registered under chapter 49.04 RCW;

(11) Adopt rules implementing a continuing competency program; and

(12) Establish by rule the procedures for an appeal of an examination failure. [2023 c 469 s 3.]

***Reviser's note:** 2023 c 469 s 4, which established the Washington state certified peer specialist advisory committee, was vetoed by the governor.

RCW 18.420.030 Representation as certified peer specialist.

Beginning July 1, 2025, except as provided in RCW 71.24.920, the decision of a person practicing peer support services to become certified under this chapter is voluntary. A person may not use the title certified peer specialist unless the person holds a credential under this chapter. [2023 c 469 s 5.]

RCW 18.420.040 Exemptions from chapter. Nothing in this chapter may be construed to prohibit or restrict:

(1) An individual who holds a credential issued by this state, other than as a certified peer specialist or certified peer specialist trainee, to engage in the practice of an occupation or profession without obtaining an additional credential from the state. The individual may not use the title certified peer specialist unless the individual holds a credential under this chapter; or

(2) The practice of peer support services by a person who is employed by the government of the United States while engaged in the performance of duties prescribed by the laws of the United States. [2023 c 469 s 6.]

RCW 18.420.050 Certification requirements. (1) Beginning July 1, 2025, except as provided in subsections (2) and (3) of this section, the secretary shall issue a certificate to practice as a certified peer specialist to any applicant who demonstrates to the satisfaction of the secretary that the applicant meets the following requirements:

(a) Submission of an attestation to the department that the applicant self-identifies as:

(i) A person with one or more years of recovery from a mental health condition, substance use disorder, or both; or

(ii) The parent or legal guardian of a youth who is receiving or has received behavioral health services;

(b) Successful completion of the education course developed and offered by the health care authority under RCW 71.24.920;

(c) Successful passage of an oral examination administered by the health care authority upon completion of the education course offered by the health care authority under RCW 71.24.920;

(d) Successful passage of a written examination administered by the health care authority upon completion of the education course offered by the health care authority under RCW 71.24.920;

(e) Successful completion of an experience requirement of at least 1,000 supervised hours as a certified peer specialist trainee engaged in the volunteer or paid practice of peer support services, in accordance with the standards in RCW 18.420.060; and

(f) Payment of the appropriate fee required under this chapter.

(2) The secretary, with the recommendation of the *advisory committee, shall establish criteria for the issuance of a certificate to engage in the practice of peer support services based on prior experience as a peer specialist attained before July 1, 2025. The criteria shall establish equivalency standards necessary to be deemed to have met the requirements of subsection (1) of this section. An applicant under this subsection shall have until July 1, 2026, to complete any standards in which the applicant is determined to be deficient.

(3) The secretary, with the recommendation of the *advisory committee, shall issue a certificate to engage in the practice of peer support services based on completion of an apprenticeship program registered and approved under chapter 49.04 RCW and reviewed by the *advisory committee under RCW 18.420.020.

(4) A certificate to engage in the practice of peer support services is valid for two years. A certificate may be renewed upon demonstrating to the department that the certified peer specialist has successfully completed 30 hours of continuing education approved by the department. As part of the continuing education requirement, every six years the applicant must submit proof of successful completion of at least three hours of suicide prevention training and at least six hours of coursework in professional ethics and law, which may include topics under RCW 18.130.180. [2023 c 469 s 7.]

***Reviser's note:** 2023 c 469 s 4, which established the Washington state certified peer specialist advisory committee, was vetoed by the governor.

RCW 18.420.060 Certification requirements—Trainee. (1)

Beginning July 1, 2025, the secretary shall issue a certificate to practice as a certified peer specialist trainee to any applicant who demonstrates to the satisfaction of the secretary that:

(a) The applicant meets the requirements of RCW 18.420.050

(1)(a), (b), (c), (d), and (4) and is working toward the supervised experience requirements to become a certified peer specialist under this chapter; or

(b) The applicant is enrolled in an apprenticeship program registered and approved under chapter 49.04 RCW and approved by the secretary under RCW 18.420.020.

(2) An applicant seeking to become a certified peer specialist trainee under this section shall submit to the secretary for approval an attestation, in accordance with rules adopted by the department, that the certified peer specialist trainee is actively pursuing the supervised experience requirements of *RCW 18.420.050(1)(d). This attestation must be updated with the trainee's annual renewal.

(3) A certified peer specialist trainee certified under this section may practice only under the supervision of an approved supervisor. Supervision may be provided through distance supervision. Supervision may be provided by an approved supervisor who is employed by the same employer that employs the certified peer specialist trainee or by an arrangement made with a third-party approved

supervisor to provide supervision, or a combination of both types of approved supervisors.

(4) A certified peer specialist trainee certificate is valid for one year and may only be renewed four times. [2023 c 469 s 8.]

***Reviser's note:** The reference to RCW 18.420.050(1)(d) appears to be erroneous. RCW 18.420.050(1)(e) was apparently intended.

RCW 18.420.070 Examination. (1) The date and location of written examinations must be established by the health care authority. Applicants who have been found by the health care authority to meet other requirements for obtaining a certificate must be scheduled for the next examination following the filing of the application. The health care authority shall establish by rule the examination application deadline.

(2) The health care authority shall administer written examinations to each applicant, by means determined most effective, on subjects appropriate to the scope of practice, as applicable. The examinations must be limited to the purpose of determining whether the applicant possesses the minimum skill and knowledge necessary to practice competently.

(3) The examination materials, all grading of the materials, and the grading of any practical work must be preserved for a period of not less than one year after the health care authority has made and published the decisions. All examinations must be conducted under fair and wholly impartial methods.

(4) Any applicant failing to make the required grade in the first written examination may take up to three subsequent written examinations as the applicant desires upon prepaying a fee determined by the health care authority for each subsequent written examination. Upon failing four written examinations, the health care authority may invalidate the original application and require remedial education before the person may take future written examinations.

(5) The health care authority may approve a written examination prepared or administered by a private organization that credentials and renews credentials for peer counselors, or an association of credentialing agencies, for use by an applicant in meeting the credentialing requirements. [2023 c 469 s 9.]

RCW 18.420.080 Renewal of certificate. The secretary shall establish, by rule, the requirements and fees for renewal of a certificate issued pursuant to this chapter. Fees must be established in accordance with RCW 43.70.110 and 43.70.250. Failure to renew the certificate invalidates the certificate and all privileges granted by the certificate. If a certificate has lapsed for a period longer than three years, the person shall demonstrate competence to the satisfaction of the secretary by completing continuing competency requirements or meeting other standards determined by the secretary. [2023 c 469 s 10.]

RCW 18.420.090 Application of uniform disciplinary act. The uniform disciplinary act, chapter 18.130 RCW, governs uncertified practice of peer support services, the issuance and denial of certificates, and the discipline of certified peer specialists and

certified peer specialist trainees under this chapter. [2023 c 469 s 12.]

RCW 18.420.800 Report—Supervisor supply adequacy. (1) The department, in consultation with the *advisory committee, shall conduct an assessment and submit a report to the governor and the committees of the legislature with jurisdiction over health policy issues by December 1, 2027.

(2) The report in subsection (1) of this section shall provide:

(a) An analysis of the adequacy of the supply of certified peer specialists serving as approved supervisors pursuant to RCW 18.420.010(2)(b) with respect to the ability to meet the anticipated supervision needs of certified peer specialist trainees upon the expiration of behavioral health providers serving as approved supervisors pursuant to RCW 18.420.010(2)(a);

(b) An assessment of whether or not it is necessary to extend the expiration of behavioral health providers serving as approved supervisors pursuant to RCW 18.420.010(2)(a) in order to meet the anticipated supervision needs of certified peer specialist trainees;

(c) Recommendations for increasing the supply of certified peer specialists serving as approved supervisors pursuant to RCW 18.420.010(2)(b), including any potential modifications to the requirements to become an approved supervisor; and

(d) Recommendations for alternative methods of providing supervision to certified peer specialist trainees, including options for team-based supervision that incorporate supervision from both behavioral health providers serving as approved supervisors pursuant to RCW 18.420.010(2)(a) and certified peer specialists serving as approved supervisors pursuant to RCW 18.420.010(2)(b). [2023 c 469 s 11.]

***Reviser's note:** 2023 c 469 s 4, which established the Washington state certified peer specialist advisory committee, was vetoed by the governor.