

NORTH CAROLINA CERTIFIED PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST PROGRAM

Program Overview



Behavioral Health Springboard (BHS)

School of Social Work

The University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill

Introduction

The North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialist (NCCPSS) Program, an initiative of the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services (DMH/DD/SUS), was established in partnership with the Behavioral Health Springboard (BHS) at the University of North Carolina's School of Social Work. In 2006, the DMH/DD/SUS formed a Peer Support Specialist Advisory Committee and contracted with BHS to oversee the creation and implementation of the NCCPSS Program. BHS oversees three main areas: certifications, course management, and stakeholder engagement.

Establishing the NCCPSS Program led to a role delineation study conducted by CASTLE Worldwide in 2007. This study involved various stakeholders in setting standards for certification curricula and training Certified Peer Support Specialists (CPSS) in North Carolina. Additionally, CASTLE Worldwide assisted in developing curriculum review guidelines, which were implemented in 2009.

In 2012, the DMH/DD/SUS sought the expertise of NCCPSS and BHS staff to update the training curriculum and conduct a quality review. A workgroup was formed, leading to several fundamental changes, including a shift in focus to include ethics and boundaries, substance use disorders, trauma-informed practices, military families, and cultural competence. These changes aimed to enhance the skills and knowledge of North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialists (CPSS). Including the expansion of the training content, the NCCPSS Program implemented the following:

- New standards expanded the focus to include ethics and boundaries, substance use disorders, trauma-informed practices, military families, and cultural competence, increasing the total domains from five to nine.
- Course developers created training-of-trainers (TOT) programs and registered their trainers with the NCCPSS Program.
- All trainers must be Certified Peer Support Specialists in North Carolina.

The Workgroup continues to meet and make recommendations about programming for implementation to the DMH/DD/SUS.

Recent Program Changes

In 2015, the NCCPSS Program implemented new standards mandating that all courses update their curricula to include the new focus areas and training-of-trainers (TOT) programs. They also included a requirement for at least a High School Diploma or its equivalent as part of the criteria for certification. Additionally, trainers must participate in quality reviews conducted by a team of BHS and DMH/DD/SUS staff, ensuring continuous improvement and maintaining high expectation standards of our training programs.

In 2019, the DMH/DD/SUS collaborated with the NCCPSS Program to engage stakeholders statewide to develop a Medicaid and state service definition for peer support. The service definition allowed peer support, initially billed as a bundled service, to be billed as a stand-alone service in North Carolina. This policy change increased training and certifications, further solidifying the program's role in the mental health and substance use disorder service delivery system. The

increase in training activities required some steps to ensure the quality of training. The NCCPSS Program made further changes in 2021, including:

- Implementing the NCCPSS Program Training Policies
- Implementing a Trainer Certification process
- Launching an online application system
- Requiring recertification of approved courses every five years
- Drafting legislation for a Peer Support Oversight Board (HB 732)
- Developing continuing education resources
- Providing technical assistance to trainers and course owners

Since implementing these standards, BHS has enhanced its processes and oversight of the NCCPSS Program.

Next Steps

In 2023, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) published the National Model Standards for Peer Certification, which outlines recommendations for certification programs. Also, a recent DMH/DD/SUS review of the NCCPSS Program prompted strategic changes to align the NCCPSS Program with SAMHSA's recommendations and meet the workforce needs of CPSS in North Carolina.

Over the next five years, the NCCPSS Program will:

- Transition to a single-course curriculum and exam
- Introduce new designations to enhance CPSS skills
- Develop a career ladder for peer support
- Strengthen accountability processes for peers

The NCCPSS Program remains steadfast in its commitment to developing a competent and respected Peer Support Specialist workforce. Our primary goal is to enhance the mental health and substance use disorder service delivery system, making a positive impact on the lives of those experiencing mental health and addiction challenges. This commitment is the driving force behind all our strategic changes and plans, ensuring that we continue to meet the needs of our stakeholders and the community we serve.