



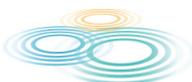
# Peer Support Accreditation and Certification (Canada)

## NATIONAL CERTIFICATION HANDBOOK

This Handbook is designed to provide a prospective certification candidate with a clear understanding of the Peer Support Accreditation and Certification (Canada) (PSACC) Standards of Practice and Certification Process.

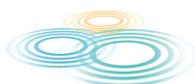
The Certification Handbook includes Standards of Practice and certification process for Certified Peer Supporters and Certified Peer Support Mentors

*Hope · Empowerment · Recovery*

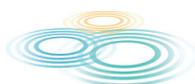


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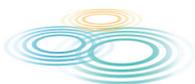


# Acknowledgements

## *With Gratitude We Acknowledge*

- the hundreds of peer support workers from across Canada who shared their passion and insights early in the project providing the basis of the standards of practice for peer support;
- the Peer Leaders Group (PLG), which consists of 13 people from all provinces and territories except PEI and North West Territories, and other advisors recognized for peer support expertise. The PLG volunteered time and effort to advise on the PSACC standards of practice and the PSACC certification process.

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# PART I - INTRODUCTION

## Introduction to the Work of Peer support

### *What is Peer support?*

Peer support is based on a relationship between people who have a lived experience in common. In the case of Peer Support the experience that individuals or groups have in common is in relation to a mental health challenge or illness, or an addiction or substance use challenge. This common experience might be relative to their own health or that of a loved one.

Peer support can happen in both group and one-to-one relationships. In either scenario, the Peer Supporter provides emotional and social support to others who share a common experience.

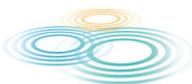
This support is grounded in hope, empowerment, and recovery. It is valued for its authenticity because the supporter has also lived through a

similar experience and has found their way to a path of recovery.

The empathy, understanding, and acquired skill of the peer supporter, coupled with their willingness to be open about their own experience, demonstrates their belief that a path for improving one's life can be created.

*“Peer support is a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful. Peer support is not based on psychiatric models and diagnostic criteria. It is about understanding another’s situation empathically through the shared experience of emotional and psychological pain.”*

*(Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001, p. 135).*



Peer support can and does happen in many different ways and in many different settings. Some relationships are quite informal and tend more towards a supportive friendship while others may be a part of a paid position within a workplace or clinical setting.

## *The Two Types of Peer Support Work*

Peer support occurs in two formats based on the type of lived experience:

- Peer support for people with lived experience (PWLE) (those who have a mental health and/or addiction challenge or illness)
- Family peer support (where the term “family” includes those in a person’s circle of support)

Both are peer-to-peer relationships meaning that the individuals or group members involved have in common a similar experience.

PWLE peer support occurs when a person with personal lived experience supports others with a mental health and/or addiction challenge or illness.

Family peer support occurs when a member of a circle of support to someone with a mental health and/or addiction challenge or illness (family or friend) offers support to others in a similar situation. This relationship recognizes the impact shared experience can have on the recovery journey of all involved.

These two types of peer support are not interchangeable. Those with personal experience support others who are also personally experiencing a health challenge or illness, and family members support other family members<sup>1</sup>. Having lived experience with both brings value to this work, but the supporter will likely identify with one more than the other.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that when reference is made to family members or family peer support we are speaking of those who are within a person’s circle of support which includes family members and significant others.

## *The Philosophy of Peer Support*

The philosophy of peer support is that each individual has within themselves the knowledge of what is best for them and a strong desire to find a path towards improved health.

The peer supporter supports that person as they search for that inner knowledge and re-ignite that hopeful desire.

Peer support is based on relationships in which each person is considered equal within the relationship and self-determination is highly respected. Peer support is focused on health and recovery rather than on illness and disability.

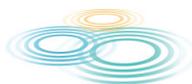
This is also true for family peer support. Each person can benefit from peer support as they discern the right path for themselves in relation to their loved one. For them, the path of recovery might include a greater level of acceptance, as well as confidence and trust in their loved-one’s abilities to move forward.

In all types of peer support relationships, empathetic understanding and experiential learning is shared in a non-judgemental and supportive manner.

## *The Value of Peer Support*

The path of recovery for a person with a health challenge or illness may include a variety of options such as bio-medical treatments, talk therapy, and/or admittance to a clinic, but accessing these therapeutic and support services can sometimes be challenging. This challenge may require a level of initiative, determination and/or understanding of a complex system that some may find to be difficult.

Peer support is an additional option that complements other forms of treatment. It can be a consolidating factor in that all aspects of a person’s journey are considered. Peer support may result in a renewed effort towards striving for the right treatment mix (for oneself or their loved one), navigating the



social service landscape, and gaining the self-confidence to advocate for themselves (or their family member). Peer support can help individuals progress towards regaining stability and a greater sense of wellness.

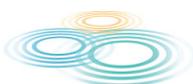
A peer supporter who has traveled a path of recovery can relate and offer empathy and validation, which offers the peer hope, a key determinant to recovery.

As partners, parents or close supporters, family peer supporters travel a different journey. They model hopefulness through a healthy sense of acceptance and emotional readiness to progress forward.

Peer support can also address social isolation. Isolation can impede recovery and increase chances of relapse. For family members there may be a tendency to 'keep the secret' within the family. This is neither helpful nor healthy.

Peer support could help to break down the stigma of mental illness. Stigma is cited as a primary reason for why people do not seek treatments for mental health issues, or encourage their loved ones to do so. Stigma can be dispelled when one person who is well says to another who is struggling, "I have it too" or "Someone I love has it too."

Peer supporters with valid experience, skills, aptitude, and high ethics provide valuable contributions to the communities in which we work and live.



## PART II - STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR PEER SUPPORTERS

### Overview of the Standards of Practice

The Peer Support Accreditation and Certification (Canada), (PSACC), Standards of Practice specify the knowledge, skills and talents (competencies), and experience that are deemed as necessary for recognition as a Certified Peer Supporter.

#### *Why Certify Peer Supporters?*

Peer support certification indicates that a peer supporter has attained the national standards as set forth by PSACC. Certifying peer supporters recognizes the contribution of peer support in the mental health and addiction field and endorses peer support work as a valid and respected career.

Peer support work is legitimate and highly regarded when provided by a capable person with appropriate skills, attitude and approach. The certification process will identify individuals who may be right for this work, ensure they have the required skills and experience, and certify those who have succeeded in their preparation for this important work<sup>2</sup>.

Certification can provide a degree of assurance that an individual is competent and trained for peer support work. Their skills may be utilized within community organizations, clinical settings, or workplaces. Peer support work is expected to grow in volume as well as be introduced into new settings.<sup>3</sup>

The PSACC certification standards received endorsement by members of the peer support community across Canada and, as such, the credentials are national in scope, allowing peer supporters to carry the credential with them between occupational settings in different provinces and territories.

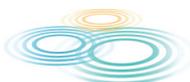
#### *What are the Three Levels of Certification?*

There are three levels of peer support work in which you may become certified:

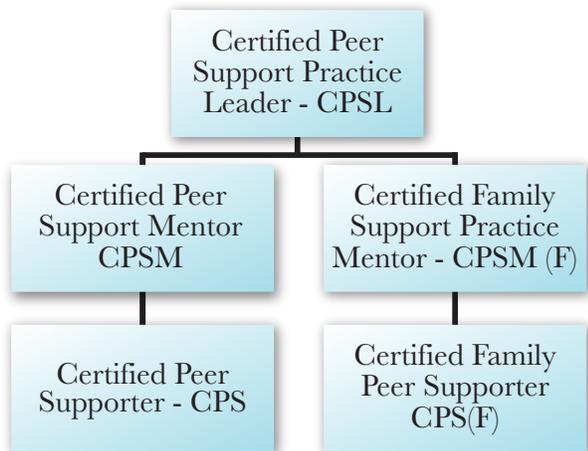
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<sup>2</sup> PSACC views certification as voluntary and willingly recognizes that not all peer supporters will choose this path.

<sup>3</sup> Note that due to the wide range of employment / volunteer opportunities, and the unlimited number of life experiences that could be valued in a peer supporter, the PSACC peer supporter certification process does not require a criminal records or police check and does not assess literacy. It is expected that each organization and workplace will have their own policy relating to these two areas.



- Certified Peer Supporter – CPS
- Certified Family Peer Supporter – CPS(F)
- Certified Peer Support Mentor – CPSM
- Certified Family Peer Support Mentor – CPSM(F)
- Certified Peer Support Practice Leader – CPSPL<sup>4</sup>



The work of Certified Peer Supporters and Certified Family Peer Supporters is focused on the provision of peer support for peers with personal lived experience and for those in family or care-giving relationships.

A Peer Support Mentor is someone who has significant experience and success as a Peer Supporter, and has demonstrated the additional knowledge, skills and competencies that are required to mentor peer supporters.

Certified Peer Support Mentors and Certified Family Peer Support Mentors are an integral part of the certification process as they will teach, guide and assess Peer Supporters as they develop skills and progress through the certification process.

A Peer Support Practice Leader is someone who has significant experience and success as a Peer Supporter and as a Mentor, and has the additional knowledge, skills and competencies that are required to develop and/or lead a peer support community of practice. This includes teaching, guiding, and assessing Peer Support Mentors.

Certified Peer Support Practice Leaders will contribute thought and insight to determine future directions of peer support work in general and endeavour to move the profession further. This leadership may be shared through various communication mediums such as membership webinars and annual conferences that support the work of peer support. In addition a significant portion of their work might be externally focused promoting awareness of the value of peer support work.

Typically Mentors and Practice Leaders are those who strive to become involved in, and represent, peer support work beyond the peer relationship.

It is expected that the number of Certified Peer Supporters will be much greater than the number of Certified Peer Support Mentors and Certified Peer Support Practice Leaders. Each of these three roles will provide an important service to our communities.

### *What are the Standards of Practice?*

The Standards of Practice include the following components:

- Lived Experience**
- In regards to experiencing mental ill health and/or addiction challenges (either personally or as a loved one) and the experience of recovery and readiness;
- Code of Conduct**
- The rules that Certified Peer Supporters agree to follow;
- Knowledge**
- The information and know-how that is required;
- Acquired Experience**
- The experience providing peer support that is required;
- Competencies**
- The natural talent and acquired skills that are required to provide peer support.

<sup>4</sup> This version does not include standards of practice and work of Peer Support Practice Leaders.



The Standards of Practice provide the basis for the certification process. Applicants for any of the three levels of peer support certification will need to meet these peer supporter standards. A higher degree of competency, knowledge, and acquired experience is expected for mentor applicants<sup>5</sup> and practice leader applicants.

## *What are the Core Values and Principles of Practice?*

Core Values and Principles of Practice guide the work of Certified Peer Supporters and Certified Peer Support Mentors.

The Core Values outline the ideals and ethics of peer support work and the Principles of Practice outline the philosophy and behaviours associated with peer support work.

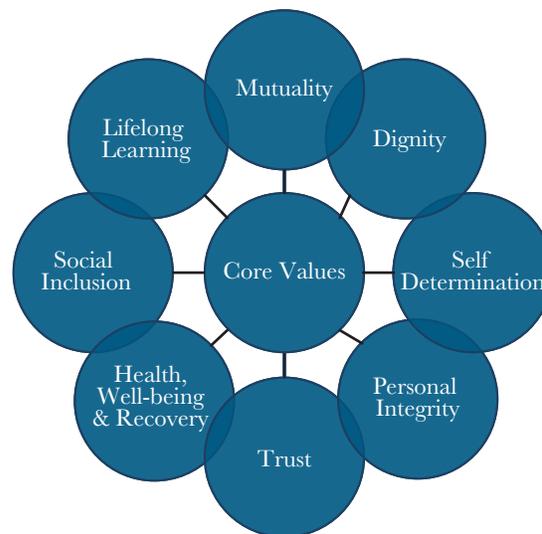
Ideally a prospective peer supporter will identify strongly with these values and naturally understand the importance of abiding by the principles of practice.

## The Core Values and Principles of Practice

Peer Support Work is rooted in a trusting relationship between a person who is currently struggling and striving to find understanding and assistance, and the peer supporter whose personal history allows him or her to understand, support, and above all model a sense of hope.

### *Core Values*

The integrity and intention of the peer supporter is key to the success of this delicate peer relationship. The Core Values provide the foundation for this important work.



#### ***Mutuality***

*We value the empathy that comes from shared experience*

#### ***Dignity***

*We honour and respect the intrinsic worth of all individuals*

#### ***Self Determination***

*We honour an individual's autonomy and inherent right to make their own choices as they determine their path to recovery*

#### ***Personal Integrity***

*We value interpersonal relationships that honour authenticity, trust, respect and ethical behavior that upholds our Code of Conduct*

#### ***Trust***

*We are honest, reliable, and accountable for our actions*

#### ***Health, Well-being and Recovery***

*We value health, well-being, recovery and the power of hope for ourselves and others*

#### ***Social Inclusion***

*We respect diversity and value social justice*

#### ***Lifelong Learning***

*We value personal growth through professional and personal development*

<sup>5</sup> See Part IV of this Certification Handbook for the Standards of Practice for Peer Support Mentors.



## *Principles of Practice*

The Principles of Practice embody the character of the relationship and the philosophy of the work. The Principles of Practice flow from the Core Values and will help to define the Standards for certification as a peer supporter.

Peer supporters:

- Recognize the importance of an individual approach to recovery.
- Honour and respect where each individual is in their own unique journey of recovery recognizing that the focus is on the process and not just the end result.
- Facilitate the self-determination and the empowerment of peers to take an active role in their recovery and wellbeing.
- Recognize that the goals, values and beliefs of their peers may not be the same as their own.
- Are collaborative in building equal, open and trusting relationships with peers.
- Share their lived experiences in a manner that demonstrates compassionate understanding and inspires hope for recovery.
- Ensure that the knowledge gained from personal experience is used in a manner that contributes to the well-being of the peer and that the relationship is always peer-focused.
- Maintain mutually agreed upon limits and boundaries in the peer support relationship.
- Respect external limits and boundaries within the context of their role as a peer supporter.
- Practice self-care, monitor their own well-being and are aware of their own needs, as well as promote self-care for their peers.
- Play an active role in connecting peers to other resources and are open to seeking help when needed.
- Are collaborative with community partners, service providers and other stakeholders.
- Aspire to be current within their field of practice by remaining up-to-date regarding available resources, especially those that are locally available, and by engaging in continuous learning.

## The Standards

The standards that must be met for certification as a Peer Supporter are detailed in this section, beginning with the code of conduct, followed by the required competencies, knowledge standard and experience standards.

### *Code of Conduct*

The Code of Conduct mirrors the Core Values of peer support work and describes the behaviour expected of certified peer supporters.

In order to proceed forward in the certification process, applicants must commit to this conduct and will base their behaviours on these standards.

#### Code of Conduct

I will act ethically, according to the values and principles of peer support

I will treat all people with respect and dignity

I will respect human diversity and will foster non-discriminatory activities

I will honour the rights, beliefs and personal values of individuals

I will behave with honesty and integrity in providing support to peers

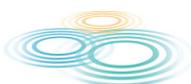
I will respect the privacy of individuals and maintain confidentiality within the limitations of program policies and the law e.g. potential harm to self or others

I will not knowingly expose a peer to harm

I will not take advantage of the peer relationship for personal benefit, material or financial gain

I will respect the boundaries of peer support work and will not engage in romantic or sexual relationships with the peers that I support

I will not provide peer support in a manner that negatively affects the public's confidence in peer support.



## *Lived Experience*

Lived experience includes experience with a mental health and/or addiction challenge or illness (experienced personally or in relation to a loved one), as well as the experience of finding a path of recovery.

Peer support work has the unique requirement of prior experience with a significant challenge or illness. The lived experience may be personal enabling them to go forward as a Peer Supporter. Or the experience may be in supporting a family member / loved one with a mental health and/or addiction challenge or illness allowing them to go forward as a Family Peer Supporter.

Recovery and wellness are critical components of lived experience. The certification process will strive to ensure that the prospective peer supporter has reached a positive state of recovery and resiliency to support others. This is important for the sake of the supporter as well as the peers that he/she is supporting.

### *Standards for Lived Experience*

These standards are primarily self-assessed. Verification of these standards will be completed in two manners: through the applicant's initial application and throughout the certification process.

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained throughout all aspects of this process.

A certified peer supporter:

- Has lived with a mental health and/or addiction challenge or illness that significantly impacted their own day to day life and is now on a recovery path. Or has a close family member or loved one with a mental health and/or addiction challenge or illness and is now demonstrating a positive state of recovery and readiness to support others in a similar situation.

- Refers to their personal life experience and their journey towards recovery and readiness in a manner that models a sense of hope for themselves and others, and demonstrates a respect for the life experience of others.
- Family Peer Supporters share aspects of their personal life experience living with and/or caring for a loved one in a manner that respects the life experience of others, models hopefulness, and shows a healthy sense of objectivity in their relationship.

## *Knowledge*

The Knowledge Standard identifies the type of information that a Certified Peer Supporter will need to know in order to be fully prepared to do peer support work.

This knowledge represents the theory learned from participation in a training session or knowledge gained from experience as an active peer supporter. This knowledge will enhance the peer supporter's competency.

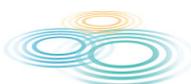
### *Standards for Knowledge*

These standards will be assessed through the completion of a Knowledge Test.

*A certified peer supporter will know:*

- I. Fundamental Concepts of Peer Support
- II. Historical and Social Context of Peer Support
- III. Concepts and Methods to Promote Effective Peer Support Relationships

Note that a Knowledge Matrix for Training is available from PSACC and outlines the Performance Objectives and Enabling Objectives for each of the stated knowledge standards.



## I. Fundamental Concepts of Peer Support

*A Peer Supporter will:*

1. Understand the recovery paradigm and how to apply it
2. Understand the key concept of self-determination and how to apply it
3. Understand the basic principles of trauma-informed care and how to apply it in practice
4. Understand how the PSACC Values and Principles of Practice promote an authentic recovery-based peer support relationship
5. Understand the components of the PSACC
6. Code of Conduct and the necessity to maintain this code while practicing peer support

## II. Historical and Social Context of Peer Support

*A Peer Supporter will:*

1. Be familiar with the historical context in which peer support has arisen
2. Understand the effects of prejudice, discrimination, and stigma related to mental illness and addiction and ways to mitigate their impact
3. Understand the social determinants of health and their impact on mental health and wellbeing
4. Be familiar with the range of settings in which peer support may be offered, and understand how to be effective within the teams or workgroups of various work place environments

## III. Concepts and Methods to Promote Effective Peer Support Relationships

*A Peer Supporter will:*

1. Understand the principles of interpersonal communication and be familiar with methods which facilitate empathic communication
2. Understand methods of building supportive, recovery-oriented peer support relationships
3. Understand processes of recovery and change and the role of peer support in these processes
4. Understand personal and role-oriented limits

and boundaries in peer support and how to negotiate and communicate them

5. Understand various types of crisis situations that peers may encounter and be familiar with strategies for supporting peers in crisis
6. Be familiar with the elements of a self-care plan and understand the importance of having a self-care plan for themselves and their peers
7. Understand how to support peers to identify their needs and rights to make informed choices in obtaining social support and advocacy services when necessary

## *Acquired Experience*

A Certified Peer Supporter will have experience<sup>6</sup> interacting and supporting peers in a manner that is consistent with the values and principles of practice, and will have achieved a greater awareness of how to use their skills and abilities in 'real' situations.

One-on-one peer support is a required component of acquired experience. Facilitation of peer support groups is also considered if the group work is grounded in the principles of peer support and recovery.

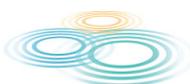
Most applicants will be required to participate in a practicum, overseen by a PSACC Certified Peer Support Mentor. The duration of the practicum is dependent on the prior experience of the applicant and the outcome of the knowledge assessment.

This hands-on opportunity helps the applicant to synthesize knowledge and skills and to further integrate the peer supporter competencies. The objective is for the applicant to learn from the experience as well as demonstrate that they meet the peer support standard of practice.

This experiential learning, coupled with feedback received from their mentor, supports the applicant's development.

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<sup>6</sup> Applicants are expected to have experience providing peer support prior to applying to start the certification process.



## Developing a Practicum Agreement

The components of the Practicum Agreement include:

- The name of the applicant's Mentor;
- The location for the practicum;
- The amount of time and a general schedule of how the time will be spent (i.e. types of activities) throughout the practicum
- Accountability and reporting plan outlining who the applicant reports to
- Community of Practice plan outlining how the applicant will connect with other peer supporters to foster their learning and personal growth
- Feedback plan outlining when, how, and by whom oversight and feedback will be provided
- Assessment plan outlining what methods the Mentor might employ to create opportunities to assess the applicant in regards to peer supporter competencies (as stated in the next section)

In some situations, the mentor and applicant will need to be creative to overcome hurdles such as geographic location or accessibility of practice situations. For those that do not have an active peer support community accessible, the mentor and applicant will determine an alternate form of involvement and support.

The Mentor will design the Practicum Agreement in partnership with the applicant. Both the mentor and the applicant will sign off on the Practicum Agreement.

The time spent in a practicum depends on the applicant's peer support experience and their situation in being able to access the range of learning opportunities. An applicant might expect their practicum to extend over a 2 to 6 month period with 50 to 150 hours of practice time. The applicant's prior experience, natural ability, and confidence to do this work will also be factors that a mentor will consider when determining the practicum agreement.

The practicum may be extended if an applicant is progressing yet requires additional time to be fully prepared and ready to work independently, or if the mentor requires additional time to assess the applicant's readiness.

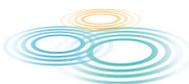
### Standards for Acquired Experience

These standards are assessed by the Mentor overseeing this applicant.

*A certified peer supporter:*

- Has participated in a variety of peer support interactions (approved by a PSACC approved Mentor) acquiring experiential learning and development to the point that the full complement of peer supporter competencies<sup>7</sup> are demonstrated and the following is true
- Demonstrates the ability to co-create and maintain supportive and mutually healthy relationships
- Demonstrates the ability to form authentic connections and have recovery oriented conversations
- Uses active, empathetic, and/or intentional listening and appears to be able to read the nuance and subtle hints provided, and responds in an appropriate manner
- Demonstrates an ability to articulate recovery and appropriately share with a peer when it is relevant and helpful
- Demonstrates knowledge of local resource options and how to access these resources
- Demonstrates a respect for appropriate timing and circumstance, and a respect for the peer's self-determination and preference, when informing a peer of resource options
- Supports peer empowerment and assists peers in learning how to advocate for their own needs
- Demonstrates good judgment regarding boundaries and limitations related to a peer's clinical concerns, a peer's personal or financial concerns, and interpersonal relationships with peers
- Demonstrates the ability to receive constructive feedback and to integrate this into development of skills

<sup>7</sup> See the section titled Competencies for information about Peer Supporter Competencies.



- Demonstrates an ability to self-assess their own strengths and limitations, and knows when and how to ask for assistance in providing peer support
- Demonstrates a commitment to personal growth and self-care in part through participation in a peer support community

An important purpose of the practicum is to provide the Mentor an opportunity to assess if the applicant meets the competency standard.

## Competencies

The competency standards describe the peer supporter's abilities and skills that are developed through a combination of life and work experience, training and education, and include individual personal effectiveness.

The following competencies are those that have been identified as essential to meet the requirements for certification as a peer supporter.

### Competencies for a Certified Peer Supporter

*A certified peer supporter demonstrates skills and abilities within the following competencies:*

Hope  
 Demeanour  
 Interpersonal Relations  
 Communication  
 Self-Management & Resiliency  
 Flexibility & Adaptability  
 Self-Awareness & Confidence  
 Initiative & Commitment  
 Critical Thinking  
 Teamwork  
 Continuous Learning & Development

#### 1. Hope

Operates from a sense of hope expressing confidence that others will be successful in their own personal journeys of recovery. Strives to model realistic optimism and a belief that even in difficult situations positive choices can be made.

#### 2. Demeanour

Is sensitive to what another might be feeling, demonstrates a capacity for non-judgmental empathy, and responds from an equal, genuine, and sharing point of view. Selectively self-discloses own experience in a manner that ensures the relationship remains peer focused.

#### 3. Interpersonal Relations

Interacts in a manner that honours the dignity of others and strives to build positive respectful relationships. Strives to make others feel comfortable and conveys genuine interest in their peer. Even in a difficult or tense situation strives to maintain a level of respect and consideration for the other.

#### 4. Communication

Listens with empathy and without judgement, holding their peers in unconditional high regard. Uses communication styles and skills to improve understanding and adapts the style and tone of communication to suit the listener and the situation. Communicates using recovery language and emphasizes the strengths of their peers.

#### 5. Self-Management & Resiliency

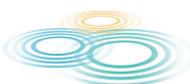
Understands the importance of self-care and stress management and models the practices that work best for them to remain healthy while supporting others. Strives to maintain calm and diffuse stressful or challenging situations.

#### 6. Flexibility & Adaptability

Is open to new ideas, deals comfortably with ambiguity, and adjusts plans or behaviours to better suit a given situation. Is willing to be open-minded and compromises when needed.

#### 7. Self-Awareness & Confidence

Interacts in a manner that demonstrates a balance of self-confidence with openness to the thoughts and opinions of others. Self-reflects and understands that personal thoughts and attitudes can influence their behaviour and actions.



## **8. Initiative & Commitment**

Is dependable and carries tasks through to completion. Demonstrates good judgement knowing when insight or assistance should be requested from another and are trustworthy when working independently.

## **9. Critical Thinking**

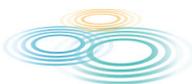
Engages in active listening skills to better understand a situation and recognizes that there is more than one way to look at an issue. Considers the possible implications or outcomes of their actions and, when asked, will help peers to explore the outcome or possible consequences of various options. Demonstrates good judgement in respecting the limits and boundaries of their role.

## **10. Teamwork**

Shares knowledge, ideas and resources with team members in a cooperative and collaborative manner. Strives to fulfill their role and responsibility within the team while respecting the roles and responsibilities of the other team members.

## **11. Continuous Learning & Development**

Strives to approach life and work in a curious manner, identifies areas where personal growth may be helpful, and takes advantage of opportunities to learn and develop. Recognizes the value of on-going personal growth and skill development and maintains a connection with a peer support community as a resource to stay 'grounded' in the work of authentic peer support.



# PART III - THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS FOR PEER SUPPORTERS

## Requirements to Achieve Certification

The requirements to achieve certification are based on the five components of the standards of practice outlined in Part II. To become certified a peer supporter must:

1. Disclose *lived experience* through to a path of recovery (either personally or as a family member)
2. Successfully complete the PSACC assessment of *knowledge* standards
3. Sign the PSACC *Code of Conduct*
4. Demonstrate *acquired experience* – by successfully completing a supervised practicum or by demonstrating previous experience providing one-on-one peer support with a credible and recognized provider of peer support services
5. Meet the *competency* requirements

Experience providing one-on-one peer support is required prior to beginning the certification process. We view certification as a confirmation

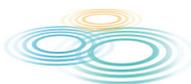
of your knowledge and experience, rather than a form of training or development.

## Types of Applicants

Peer support work, as a grassroots initiative, has a long and rich history. Having the option to become certified as a peer supporter is relatively new, therefore it is expected that applicants for certification may present with a range of peer support experience.

- Some will have experience as a peer supporter, with or without peer support training, and are now interested in applying for certification.
- Others will have a high level of experience, having practiced for many years, prior to choosing to apply for certification.

Full compliance with the Standards outlined in Part II must be met for all types of peer supporter applicants. The number of years providing peer support (in a manner consistent with the PSACC Principles of Practice), and the applicant's



mark on the knowledge assessment, will be considered when determining the length and type of practicum required during the Acquired Experience phase. For those with extensive experience and knowledge a practicum may be waived and replaced with an interview and observation. See the section titled Phase 3 – Acquired Experience & Final Assessment for more information.

## The Peer Supporter Certification Process

### *Understanding the 4 Phases of the Certification Process*

The process to become a Certified Peer Supporter begins with a formal application to PSACC and then flows through 4 phases as indicated below:

#### **Phase 1 – Initial Screening**

The applicant will submit an application which requests contact information for 3 to 5 references and an overview of acquired experience to date. The references will be asked to provide a reference in the form of an on-line questionnaire.

#### Objective:

The objective of the initial screening phase is to determine if the applicant has the basic requirements of relevant lived experience, initial competencies (such as interpersonal communication abilities and a hopeful outlook), and some prior experience providing peer support.

#### **Phase 2 – Knowledge**

The applicant will complete the PSACC Knowledge Assessment (test) and sign the PSACC Code of Conduct. While prior participation in peer support training may be recommended it is not a requirement.<sup>8</sup>

#### Objective:

The objective of the knowledge phase is to determine if the applicant has a good grasp of the essential knowledge that will be the foundation of their work in peer support.

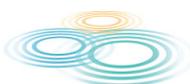
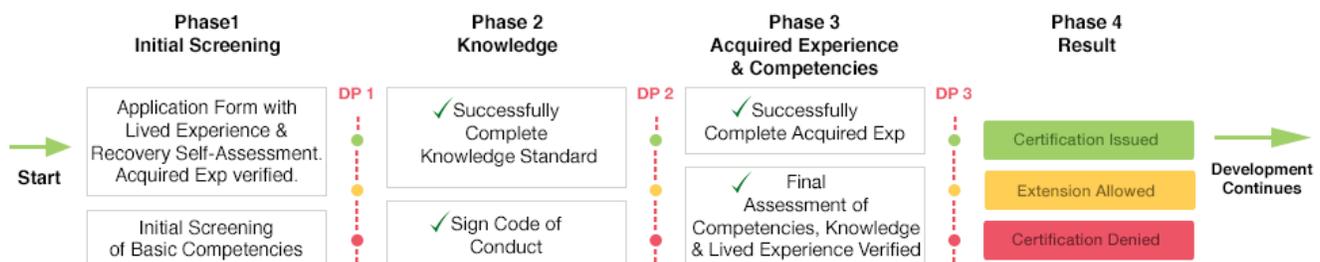
#### **Phase 3 – Acquired Experience & Final Assessment**

The applicant will participate in a practicum (stagier) to further develop and demonstrate the full complement of competencies and a readiness to do peer support work. The duration of the practicum will be dependent on the applicant's prior experience providing peer support.

A practicum may be waived if the applicant's prior experience providing peer support is extensive and if he/she achieved 80% or greater on the knowledge assessment.

<sup>8</sup> PSACC can provide a Knowledge Matrix for Training that outlines the topics that PSACC considers to be relevant and necessary, but PSACC does not provide training.

### *The 4-Phase Certification Process for a Peer Supporter*



A PSACC Certified Peer Support Mentor will oversee and assess the applicant as he/she progresses through their practicum. If a practicum is waived, a PSACC Certified Peer Support Mentor will participate in an interview and observation<sup>9</sup> of at least two peer support interactions in order to provide an assessment of the applicant's competencies.

Following the acquired experience / practicum component the final competency assessment occurs. Mentor(s), supervisor(s), and others are asked to complete a competency questionnaire. The candidate also completes this same questionnaire. Feedback from peers, who have received support from the candidate, will also be requested. This results in a 360° assessment on competencies.

Objective:

The objective of the practicum is to provide an opportunity for the candidate to assimilate knowledge and acquire practical experience, and to demonstrate competencies. Upon completion of the practicum, the mentor will provide a final assessment of competency and readiness.

The objective of the interview and observation (if the practicum is waived) is to facilitate the mentor becoming more familiar with the candidate and their peer support competencies.

The objective of the 360° competency assessment is to assist in determining if all 5 components of the Standard of Practice have been met.

**Phase 4 – Result**

One of the three possible outcomes will result: certification, extension of the certification preparation process, or denial of certification.

For those awarded certification, continued education and development is expected to be an on-going requirement for maintaining their certification.

Note that a maximum timeline of 1 year is expected to proceed through to the 4th phase. However if an applicant is proceeding at a slower pace for whatever reason<sup>10</sup>, they may notify PSACC of their intention to remain in the certification process and request an extension.

**The Decision Points**

A decision point (DP) follows each phase and is coded green, yellow, or red.

**Green Rating:** If an applicant receives a green rating they are considered ready to proceed forward.

**Yellow Rating:** If an applicant receives a yellow rating they are permitted to proceed forward with a cautionary statement indicating that additional time to prepare or to become better prepared to do the work may be required. The applicant will receive feedback indicating those areas in which additional time and/or effort may be required.

It may be that a yellow rating is awarded in one phase but in the following phase the participant may demonstrate that they have overcome the concern and proceed forward with no problem. For example, the recovery or readiness of a candidate may be in question at phase 1, but through additional time spent with the candidate in phases 2 and 3 it may become evident that recovery / readiness is no longer a concern. Or in phase 2 a candidate may appear to be on-the-line in their knowledge, but in the practicum of phase 3 may demonstrate a good understanding of the knowledge components and an ability to do quality peer support.

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<sup>9</sup> Note that the 'interview and observation' may occur in person or by using skype or telephone. One aspect of the interview will be to discuss feedback from prior components of the certification process, including the knowledge assessment. Prior to and during the observation every precaution will be taken to ensure that the peer (the person seeking support) participating in the peer support interaction is comfortable with the observation, understands its purpose, and agrees to participate.

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<sup>10</sup> Note that one reason for a slower pace might be related to limited resources, in particular a limited number of PSACC-approved Peer Support Mentors. As PSACC progresses forward during these early years in its development, increasing the number of PSACC Certified Peer Support Mentors across Canada is a priority.



A yellow rating in phase 4 indicates that the applicant is seen as progressing but is not yet meeting the full requirements for certification. The applicant will receive feedback and guidance from their mentor on which areas need additional time and effort. It may be appropriate to access additional training, spend additional time practicing peer support, or to take a break before returning to the process.

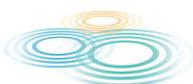
**Red Rating:** An applicant will receive a red rating at a decision point if it is determined that this person is not expected to be suitable for peer support work. The applicant will receive feedback with a clear identification of the areas in which it was decided that their demonstrated experience, skills and/or abilities were not compatible, or expected to become compatible, with the requirements of peer support work.

## Assessment of Recovery and Readiness

Due to the unique requirement of having lived experience with a mental health and/or addiction challenge or illness, it is noted that setbacks may occur for some during the certification process. The setback may be minor in nature resulting in a short period of time away from the process, or it may be a relatively significant relapse. Whatever the case, a setback will not cause PSACC to outright disallow any progress already made in the process.

If a setback interrupts during the practicum, the applicant, in conjunction with their Mentor, will reevaluate and determine a modified plan. The goal is for all participants is to progress through the process in a manner that allows them to learn and practice while maintaining their personal health. Depending on the amount of time away, the applicant and/or Mentor may decide that repeating certain aspects of the process would be beneficial to the applicant's progress.

Recognizing that peer supporters need to maintain their own health and wellness, for their sake and the sake of their peers, it may be found that additional time and attention to personal growth is needed before an applicant is ready to proceed towards certification.



## Recertification

It is expected that Certified Peer Supporters will continue to develop skills and remain active within the peer support field.

Recertification is expected at regular intervals following receipt of certification.

*Recertification requirements are not yet specified.*

## The PSACC Certification Committee

The PSACC Certification Committee reports to the PSACC Board of Directors and is accountable for all decisions related to certification, revocation of certification, and appeals.

### *Appeals*

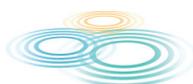
If an applicant wishes to appeal decisions being made in relation to their certification process they may bring this forward to the Certification Committee.

This may include recommendations or decisions of the Mentor that is overseeing their practicum and/or assessing their acquired experience and competencies.

## *Revocation of Certification*

Applicants who become Certified Peer Supporters, Certified Peer Support Mentors, or Certified Peer Support Practice Leaders agree to abide by the PSACC Code of Conduct.

If PSACC finds that a certified member has not abided by any portion of the Code of Conduct, an investigation will be completed, and the Certification Committee will propose an appropriate course of action which may include revocation of the person's certification



# PART IV –STANDARDS OF PRACTICE FOR PEER SUPPORT MENTORS

## Overview of Peer Support Mentors

A Peer Support Mentor is someone who has significant experience and success as a Peer Supporter, and has demonstrated the additional knowledge, skills and competencies that are required to mentor peer supporters.

Certified Peer Support Mentors and Certified Family Peer Support Mentors are an integral part of the certification process as they will teach, guide and assess Peer Supporters as they develop skills and progress through the certification process.

At this point in PSACC’s development, it is assumed that an applicant to the mentor certification process is interested in growing the field of peer support by participating in peer supporter certification activities.

## Standards of Practice for Mentors

The Peer Support Mentor Standard of Practice continues to refer to the following five components that make up the Peer Supporter Standard of Practice.

### Lived Experience

Assessed in CPS certification process.

### Code of Conduct

Signed during CPS certification process

### Knowledge

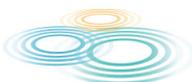
The information and know-how that is required for Peer Support Mentors and Peer Support Family Mentors.

### Acquired Experience

The experience practicing being a PSACC Mentor.

### Competencies

The natural talent and acquired skills that are required to be a peer support mentor.



There is no difference in the Lived Experience Standard and the Code of Conduct for peer support mentors and peer supporters. The Knowledge, Acquired Experience, and Competency standards for a peer support mentor build on the base of knowledge, experience, and competencies of a Certified Peer Supporter.

#### Lived Experience

The Lived Experience is the same as it is for a PSACC Certified Peer Supporter.

#### Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct is the same as it is for a PSACC Certified Peer Supporter and must continue to be maintained.

#### Knowledge Standard

The Knowledge Standard identifies the type of information that a Certified Peer Support Mentor will need to know in order to be fully prepared to work as a mentor.

This knowledge represents theory learned from participation in topic specific training sessions or from self-guided reading and research. This knowledge will enhance the peer supporter's competencies. It is assumed that a peer supporter will have engaged in additional training and/or career development, which will help to grow expertise in the following knowledge areas.

*These standards will be assessed through the completion of a Mentor Knowledge Test.*

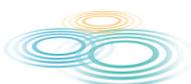
A certified peer supporter will know:

- I. Foundations of Peer Support and Peer Support Mentoring
- II. Advanced Concepts and Methods related to Effective Peer Support Relationships
- III. Concepts related to Mentoring, Assessing, and Personnel Development

## I. Foundations of Peer Support and Peer Support Mentoring

A Peer Support Mentor will:

1. Fully comprehend all knowledge components within the Peer Supporter Standard of Practice.
2. Be able to explain concepts such as peer support, recovery, social determinants of health, stigma, trauma-informed practice, as well as the importance of self-determination, hope, and empowerment.
3. Understand the rights of people with mental health challenges or illness (within your region)
4. Understand the similarities and differences of peer support and family-based peer support, in particular in relation to choice and self-determination.
5. Be aware of the history of peer support, in particular the challenges and positive outcomes related to the integration of peer support into more traditional mental health systems.
6. Be aware of the roles of various members of multi-disciplinary health teams including the role of a peer supporter within a team
7. Understand the role and responsibility of a peer support mentor within the PSACC Certification process, and how effective performance of this role can impact the growth of peer support



## II. Advanced Concepts and Methods related to Effective Peer Support Relationships

A Peer Support Mentor will:

8. Understand the value of, and the principles of, trauma-informed practice.
9. Understand the principles of crisis intervention and suicide intervention, and understand how to assess risk to know the type of intervention called for.
10. Be aware of the importance of advocacy, the limits of advocacy, and effective approaches when advocating for another.
11. Be aware of the balance between advocacy and empowerment, and understand how to support growth in empowerment and self-advocacy.
12. Be aware of techniques to effectively communicate by phone, skype, email, and other similar technologies.

## III. Concepts related to Mentoring, Assessing, and Personnel Development

Advanced communication skills, relevant to guiding and assessing others, will be a part of this knowledge component.

A Peer Support Mentor will:

13. Understand why empathetic communication and the principles of peer support, (that are deemed critical in peer support), continue to be important in peer support mentoring
14. Be aware of various communication/oversight approaches and understand when each is most appropriate:

Examples include, understanding when to:

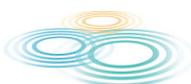
- i. *provide constructive feedback vs intervene in order to correct or stop an action;*
  - ii. *encourage learning or empower through exploring possible approaches vs advise, or advocate on behalf of, a peer supporter;*
15. Be aware of various learning styles and understand how to adapt to a person's learning style.
  16. Be aware of the purpose of assessing the competencies of peer supporter candidates and the overall importance of this assessment process on the field of peer support.
  17. Be aware of various strategies to: build mentee confidence; establish trust in the mentor/mentee relationship so that a mentee is comfortable confiding perceived shortcomings; and foster independence over the course of the mentoring relationship

### Acquired Experience Standard

It is intended that a mentor candidate will have significant experience as a peer support mentor or practice mentoring under the tutelage of an experienced PSACC Certified Mentor as a part of their preparation.

A Certified Peer Support Mentor (CPSM) or Certified Family Peer Support Mentor, CPSM(F):

- Is a PSACC Certified Peer Supporter or PSACC Certified Family Peer Supporter in good standing
- Has a minimum of 5 years of experience working in peer support



- Has skills or expertise in at least one of the following:
  - ✓ peer support program development/management,
  - ✓ peer support coordination,
  - ✓ mentoring or training of peer supporters.
- Has co-mentored at least 2 CPS applicants with a PSACC approved Mentor.

Each mentor candidate will have an 'Acquired Experience Plan' approved by the PSACC Certification Committee to ensure that acceptable development and training in the expectations of a PSACC Certified Mentor is accomplished.

### Competency Standard

All peer supporter competencies remain relevant. Mentors will build on these base peer supporter competencies and demonstrate additional competencies required for success as a Mentor.

*Competencies will be assessed through an on-line competency assessment.*

#### 1. Guiding/Mentoring

Guides / coaches / mentors others to strengthen their knowledge, skills and abilities related to peer support work in a manner that aligns with peer support principles.

#### 2. Feedback and Assessment

Creates a trusting and supportive environment where honest and constructive feedback discussions occur in a manner that is empowering and promotes open discussion and strengths-based confidence, while meeting the needs of PSACC Practicum, Acquired Experience and Competency Assessments.

#### 3. Advocacy

Expresses the value of peer support and/or the needs of peers and peer supporters in a clear and diplomatic manner that strives to build bridges between different experiences and opinions, and when necessary results in change / action / support being provided for a person in need.

#### 4. Critical Thinking

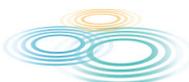
Is able to gather and assess information and insights that relate to interpersonal, boundary, and code of conduct issues, and manages the resolution of these issues in a manner that is consistent with PSACC SOP, respectful to all involved, and constructive.

#### 5. Leadership

Promotes the professional development of others by the sharing of formal knowledge, experiential insight, and resources both individually and within communities of practice. Promotes growth of peer support by finding ways to creatively overcome geographic and accessibility challenges, and by effectively working with health care and community settings to integrate peer support.

#### 6. Communication and Organization

Demonstrates good written communication skills, basic computer literacy, good organization skills, and reliability. Also demonstrates a high level of empathetic, interpersonal, and listening/communication skills that are foundations of peer support.



# PART V – THE CERTIFICATION PROCESS FOR PEER SUPPORT MENTORS

## Requirements to Achieve Certification as a Peer Support Mentor:

Prior to acceptance into the PSACC mentor certification process, the mentor candidate will:

- Be a PSACC Certified Peer Supporter or Certified Family Peer Supporter in good standing<sup>11</sup>
- Have a minimum of 5 years of experience working in peer support

Upon completion of the PSACC mentor certification process, the mentor candidate will have:

- Passed the PSACC knowledge assessment
- Successfully co-mentored 2 CPS applicants with a PSACC approved Mentor
- Met the mentor competencies

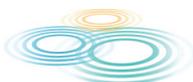
## The 4 Phases of the Mentor Certification Process:

The certification process for a Certified Peer Support Mentor consists of 4 phases:

### **Phase 1 – Application**

The applicant submits an application verifying the prerequisites of being a PSACC Certified Peer Supporter or Family Peer Supporter in good standing and having a minimum of 5 years of experience working in peer support.

<sup>11</sup> Note that meeting the PSACC Certified Peer Supporter standards indicates: that the candidate's lived experience, knowledge, acquired experience, and competencies meet the PSACC Standard for peer supporters; and that the candidate is committed to the PSACC Code of Conduct.



Note that the requirement of Lived Experience and adherence to the PSACC Code of Conduct is inherent with being a CPS or CPS(F).

### **Phase 2 – Knowledge**

The applicant will complete the PSACC Mentor Knowledge Assessment (test) demonstrating the Mentor Knowledge Standard.

### **Phase 3 – Acquired Experience & Final Competency Assessment**

The applicant will co-mentor two CPS or CPS(F) practicums with two different PSACC approved Mentors as a part of their Acquired Experience standard. The PSACC approved Mentors will oversee and assess the applicant as he/she progresses through their co-mentor experience.

Upon completion of the co-mentoring opportunities, the final assessment of mentor competencies will be assessed by the two PSACC approved mentors, supervisors or others familiar with their peer support mentoring work, and the CPS/ CPS(F) applicants who participated in the practicums.

### **Phase 4 – Result**

One of the three possible outcomes will result: certification, extension of the certification preparation process, or denial of certification.

For those awarded certification, continued education and development is expected to be an on-going requirement for maintaining their Mentor certification.

## Recertification

It is expected that Certified Peer Support Mentors will continue to develop skills and remain active within the peer support field.

Recertification is expected at regular intervals following receipt of certification.

*Recertification requirements are not yet specified.*

## The PSACC Certification Committee

The PSACC Certification Committee reports to the PSACC Board of Directors and is accountable for all decisions related to certification, revocation of certification, and appeals for both peer supporters and peer support mentors.

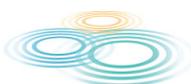
### *Appeals*

If an applicant wishes to appeal decisions being made in relation to their certification process they may bring this forward to the Certification Committee.

### *Revocation of Certification*

Applicants who become Certified Peer Supporters, Certified Peer Support Mentors, or Certified Peer Support Practice Leaders agree to abide by the PSACC Code of Conduct.

If PSACC finds that a certified member has not abided by any portion of the Code of Conduct, an investigation will be completed, and the Certification Committee will propose an appropriate course of action which may include revocation of the person's certification.



# Appendix 1 – Glossary of Terms

This Glossary of Terms is being developed. Additional terms will be added in future versions.

**Peer:** A person who seeks support from a peer supporter

**Peer Supporter or Peer Support Worker:** Peer supporters, also known as peer support workers, are people who have lived experience with a mental health and/or addiction challenge or illness, either personally or through a loved one, and provide support to others facing similar difficulties. They can be volunteers or in paid positions, and are sometimes referred to as peer counsellors or peer specialists.

**Peer supporters:**

- foster self-determination;
- focus on a recovery orientation;
- offer non-clinical support in the form of emotional and social support;
- offer information;
- and through their lived experience of illness and recovery, they foster hope.

**Recovery:** Recovery is a dynamic process therefore a peer supporter is said to be on a path of recovery and considered to be far enough along on that path when they have an ability to detect when they are in need of a health break.

Describing recovery or readiness (within the context of peer support) is done in an individual manner that considers factors such as personal growth and the environment in which the person will be interacting. A description of recovery would incorporate:

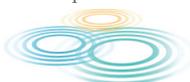
- A sense of hope for the future, rather than hopelessness, allowing peer support workers to be beacons of hope for others.
- A sense of mastery over one's life that includes self-care and resiliency strategies to help maintain a sense of wellness and emotional health, even if mental health challenges and/or symptoms are still present.
- A self-awareness that allows a person to know when stressors or stress levels are reaching an unhealthy level.
- A confident and empowered sense of self within their relationships and their community that contributes to quality of life.
- Is ready and able to share aspects of their own lived experience in a manner that is helpful to the peer and keeps the focus on the peer's experience<sup>12</sup>.

**Standards of Practice:** Standards of Practice specify the lived experience, knowledge, competencies (skills and abilities), acquired experience, and code of conduct which provide the framework of proficiency required for peer supporters to be considered for certification by PSACC.

**Communities of Practise (CoP):** CoP are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in an area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

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<sup>12</sup> Adapted from MHCC Guidelines for the Practice of Peer Support, 2013.



## *Certificate Award Levels*

**Certification:** is the end result of a process in which a person proves that he or she has the skill, abilities, experience, and ethics to perform a specific job. Certification acknowledges an individual's competency or compliance against some type of assessment criteria. The proof comes in the form of a certificate awarded by an organization or association that monitors and upholds prescribed standards for the particular industry involved. The certificate assures employers, customers, and the public that the certificate holder is competent and professional. The use of letters, acronyms and the word "certified", which attest this credential are solely reserved for holders of professional certifications.

PSACC awards certification to peer supporters that meet the PSACC Standards of Practice.

**Certificate of attendance:** certificates of attendance or participation are provided to individuals (participants) who have attended or participated in classes, courses, or other education/training programs or events. The certificate awarded at the completion of the program or event signifies that the participant was present and in some cases that the participant actively participated in the program or event. Demonstrating accomplishment of the intended learning outcomes by participants is NOT a requirement for receiving a certificate<sup>13</sup>.

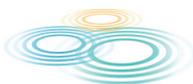
**Assessment based certificate:** is based on a non-degree granting program that: a) provides instruction and training to aid participants in acquiring specific knowledge, skills, and/or competencies associated with intended learning outcomes; b) evaluates participants' accomplishments of the intended learning outcomes; and c) awards a certificate only to those participants who meet the performance, proficiency, or passing standard for the assessment(s); hence the term assessment-based certificate program<sup>14</sup>.

PSACC does not provide/award certificate of attendance or assessment based certificate.

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<sup>13</sup> This definition is utilized by the Institute of Credentialing Excellence in the U.S.

<sup>14</sup> This definition is utilized by the Institute of Credentialing Excellence in the U.S.



## *Human Resource Terms*

**Aptitude:** the inherent potential to become capable of performing a function. Aptitude is assessed using standardized psychometric tests that assess a person's natural ability to learn by measuring, for example, numeracy, verbal comprehension, inductive and abstract reasoning skills.

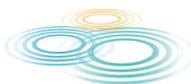
**Ability:** the capacity to perform a function permitting or facilitating achievement or accomplishment. Ability is often used interchangeably with the word skill.

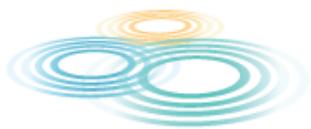
**Skill:** ability to perform a mental or motor activity that contributes to the effective performance of a job task. Skill is developed through a combination of learning, training/education, experience, and also includes an individual's personal effectiveness. Skill can be expressed as ability + technique. There are two main types of skills, hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills can be taught, are easily identified and are tangible, for example occupational skills such as knowing how to perform a specific technical or administrative task or how to operate a computer program. Soft skills are rather abstract in nature, are not easily measured and are associated with an individual's ability to effectively interact with others. Examples are: having a positive attitude, exercising good judgement, remaining calm under pressure, showing empathy, and being flexible.

**Skill set:** A list of all the hard and soft skills needed to perform a job, or it can be an individual's own description of all the skills he/she has to bring to a job.

**Competency:** The capacity to draw upon and apply, through demonstrated behaviour, a set of related knowledge, skill and experience to successfully perform a work role, function, or task.

**Competency standard:** Describes how well a skill has to be performed to allow an assessment to be made of the particular skill/ability through observance of the behaviour exhibited by the person performing it. Competency standards represent the language of performance required.





## Peer Support Accreditation and Certification (Canada)

Accréditation et certification du soutien par les pairs (Canada)

[www.psac-canada.com](http://www.psac-canada.com)

