



## MEDI-CAL CODE OF ETHICS FOR PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS IN CALIFORNIA

ADAPTED BY DHCS 7.26.21

<b>Purpose</b>	<p>Peer support services are recovery-oriented and resiliency-focused services for those managing behavioral health challenges as well as the parents, family members, and caregivers that support them. Peer support services are evidence-based practices that provide role models to inspire hope, demonstrate a life of recovery and resiliency, and encourage real advocacy.</p> <p>This Values and Ethics document promotes a consistent message to those who are providing, receiving, and supervising services from a Peer Support Specialist. The Values and Ethics described here formalizes and advances peer support services in California's behavioral health system of care.</p> <p>For the purpose of this document "Peer Support Specialist" refers to anyone who is providing services in the behavioral health field using their "lived experience" to establish mutuality and build resiliency and recovery.</p>
<b>Values</b> <b>Hope</b>	<b>Ethical Standards</b> Peer Support Specialists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inspire hope in those engaging in services by living a life of Recovery and/or Resiliency.</li></ul>
<b>Person-Driven</b>	Peer Support Specialists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support individuals receiving services and their support network within the context of their worldview, to achieve their goals based upon their needs and wants.</li><li>• Focus on self-determination, as defined by the person engaging in services, and support the person's participation in their own recovery.</li><li>• Inform others about options, provide information about choices, and then respect peers' decisions.</li><li>• Encourage people to look at the options, take risks, learn from mistakes, and grow from dependence</li></ul>

on the system toward healthy interdependence with others.

- Uphold the principle of non-coercion as essential to recovery and encourage those engaging in services to make their own decisions, even when the person engaging in services is under mandated treatment.
- Assist those they support to access additional resources.
- Disclose lived experiences of recovery in a way that maintains the focus on and is beneficial to the person engaging in services.
- Support the recovery process for the peer, allowing the person to direct their own process.
- Shall not force any values or beliefs onto the person engaging in services.
- Recognize there are many pathways to recovery that can be very different than their own journey.

### **Family Driven and Child-Centered**

#### Peer Support Specialists:

- Promote the family member's ethical decision-making and personal responsibility consistent with that family member's culture, values, and beliefs.
- Respect and value the beliefs, opinions, and preferences of children, youth, family members, parents, and caregivers in service planning.
- Promote the family members' voices and the articulation of their values in planning and evaluating behavioral health related challenges or concerns.
- Support other family members as peers with a common background and history.
- Disclose personal lived experiences of building resiliency in a way that focuses on and is beneficial to the child, youth, family member, parent, or caregiver engaging in services.
- Build supports on the strengths of the child, youth, family, or caregiver.
- Build partnerships with others who are involved in the care of our children, youth, or adult family members.
- Communicate clearly and honestly with children, youth, family members, and caregivers.

### **Holistic Wellness**

#### Peer Support Specialists:

- Promote the family member's ethical decision-making and personal responsibility consistent with that family member's culture, values, and beliefs.
- Practice in a holistic manner that considers and addresses the whole health of those engaging in services.
- Recognize the impact of co-occurring challenges (substance use, developmental and physical challenges) in the recovery resiliency journey and provide supports sensitive to those needs.
- Recognize the impact of trauma on the recovery/resiliency journey and provide the support specific

to those challenges.

- Honor the right of persons engaging in services to choose alternative treatments and practices, including culturally-specific traditional methods, healing arts, including acupuncture and meditation, spiritual practices or secular beliefs, and harm reduction practices.

## Authenticity

### Peer Support Specialists:

- Practice honest and direct communication in a culturally relevant manner, saying what is on their mind in a respectful way. Difficult circumstances are addressed with those who are directly involved. Direct communication moves beyond the fear of conflict or hurting other people to the ability to work together to resolve challenges with caring and compassion.
- Share own lived experience to provide hope and inspiration for recovery.
- Practice healthy disclosure about their own experience focused on providing hope and direction toward recovery and/or resiliency.
- Work within their scope of practice as defined by this Code of Ethics and their employing agency.
- Remain aware of their skills and limitations, and do not provide services or represent themselves as an expert in areas for which they do not have sufficient knowledge or expertise.
- Know that maintaining the authenticity and integrity of their role is critical to the effectiveness of peer support services.
- Seek supervision, peer support services, and/or other contact with peer colleagues or other supports to stay within their scope of practice.

## Cultural Responsiveness & Humility

### Peer Support Specialists:

- Acknowledge the importance of language and culture, intersecting identities, knowledge, and acceptance of dynamics of cultural differences, expansion of cultural knowledge, curiosity, and adaptation of services to meet culturally unique needs.
- Strive to provide culturally responsive and relevant services to those they support.
- Respect cultural identities and preferences of those engaging in services and their families and respect the right of others to hold opinions, beliefs, and values different from their own.
- Shall not discriminate against others on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, or mental or physical differences.
- Shall not discriminate against others on the basis of any other preference, personal characteristic, condition, state, or cultural factor protected under Federal, State or local law.
- Seek further information, education, and training in cultural competence as necessary to assist those

they support.

## **Respect**

### Peer Support Specialists:

- Provide a welcoming environment for persons engaging in services.
- Approach each person, youth, parent or family member with openness, genuine interest, and appreciation.
- Accept each person/family and situation as unique.
- Provide empathy and able to “put oneself in the other person’s shoes.”
- Will make an honest effort to empathize with the emotional connection and cultural context that the persons engaging in services bring to the recovery/ resiliency relationship.
- View everyone as having something important and unique to contribute.
- Value and treat others with kindness, warmth, dignity, and without judgment.
- Accept each other and are open to sharing with people from many diverse backgrounds including ethnicity, educational levels, socio-economic background, sexual preference, and religion/spirituality.
- Honor and make room for everyone’s opinions and see each other as equally capable of contributing.
- Demonstrate respect toward those supported, colleagues and the community.
- Use language that is respectful, “person-first,” and culturally mindful to, and with, those supported, colleagues and the community.
- Never use language that could be construed as, or is, derogatory, insulting, or demeaning in written, electronic, or verbal communications.
- Communicate with co-workers and colleagues in ways that promote hope, compassion, and solution-focused interactions.

## **Integrity**

### Peer Support Specialists:

- Act in accordance with the highest standards of professional integrity.
- Avoid relationships or commitments that conflict with the interests of persons engaging in services, impair professional judgment, imply a conflict of interest, or create risk of harm to those supported.
- Conduct themselves in a way that does not jeopardize the integrity of the peer relationship.
- Seek supervision to handle any real or potential conflicts when and if a dual relationship is unavoidable.
- Follow organizational policies and guidelines regarding giving and receiving gifts.
- Consider the cultural context and other potential considerations related to gifts.
- Do not lend, give, or receive money or payment for any services to, or from, persons they support.

- Demonstrate accountability in fulfilling commitments.
- Resist influences that interfere with professional performance.
- Shall not commit fraud, waste or abuse in the delivery of Medi-Cal services.
- Cooperate with complaint investigations and supply information requested during complaint investigations unless such disclosure of information would violate the confidentiality requirements of Subpart 2, Title 42, Code of Federal Regulations.
- Shall not provide services under the influence of any amount of alcohol, marijuana, or illicit drugs. “Illicit drugs” means any substance defined as a drug in Section 11014, Chapter 1, Division 10, Health and Safety Code, except:
  - Drugs or medications prescribed by a physician or other person authorized to prescribe drugs, in accordance with Section 4036, Chapter 9, Division 2, Business and Professions Code, and used in the dosage and frequency prescribed; or
  - Over-the-counter drugs or medications used in the dosage and frequency described on the box, bottle, or package insert.
- Shall not secure a certification by fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - Making a false statement on any application for certification.
  - Withholding material information on any application for certification.
  - Impersonating another Peer Support Specialist or permitting or allowing another person to use their certification for the purpose of providing peer support services.
- Shall not engage in gross negligence or incompetence in the performance of peer support services. This includes:
- Failing to maintain records consistent with sound judgement, the standards of the profession, and the nature of the services being rendered.

**Advocacy**

Peer Support Specialists:

- Support the formulation, development, enactment, and implementation of public policies of concern to the profession.
- Demonstrate and promote activities that respect diversity.
- Support and defend human rights and freedoms regardless of nationality, national origin, gender identity, ethnicity, religion or spiritual persuasion, language, disability, sexual identity, or socio-economic status. Human rights include civil and political rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and freedom of expression; social, cultural, and economic rights including the right to cultural expression,

the right to have basic needs met, and the right to work and receive an education.

- Advocate for inclusion of those supported in all aspects of services.
- Advocate for the full involvement of those supported in the communities of their choice and will promote their value to those communities.
- Understand, encourage, and empower self-advocacy.
- Recognize that all individuals/families have the right to live in the safest and least restrictive, culturally congruent environment.
- Strive to eliminate stigma and discrimination

## Confidentiality

Peer Support Specialists:

- Respect the rights, dignity, privacy, and confidentiality of persons engaging in services at all times.
- Respect the right to privacy of those supported and shall not solicit private information from those supported unless it is essential. Once private information is shared, standards of confidentiality apply.
- Respect confidential information shared by colleagues in the course of their professional relationships and interactions unless such information relates to an unethical or illegal activity.
- Comply with all applicable federal and state confidentiality laws and guidelines. (In accordance with Part 2, Title 42, Code of Federal Regulations and HIPAA requirements).
- Discuss with persons engaging in services, and other interested parties, the nature of confidentiality and limitations of the right to confidentiality.

## Safety & Protection

Peer Support Specialists:

- Never engage in romantic or sexual/intimate activities with the persons engaging in services.
- Shall not provide services to individuals with whom they have had a prior romantic or sexual relationship.
- Shall not engage in exploitive relationships with coworkers or those they support to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.
- Follow applicable federal, state and local laws in the prevention of harm.
- Inform appropriate persons when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to persons served or other identifiable persons. In all instances, Peer Support Specialists should disclose the least amount of confidential information necessary to achieve the desired purpose.
- Never intimidate, threaten, harass, use undue influence, physical force, or verbal abuse, or make unwarranted promises of benefits to persons engaging in services.
- Recognize the unique nature of the peer relationship and seek supervision and/or peer support

<b>Education</b>	<p>services, as necessary, to maintain appropriate boundaries with persons engaging in services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treat colleagues with respect, courtesy, fairness, and good faith, and uphold the Code of Ethics. Strive to provide a safe environment that is respectful of the impact of trauma on persons engaging in services.</li> </ul> <p>Peer Support Specialists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remain current regarding new developments in recovery, resiliency and wellness theories, methods, and approaches of related disciplines/systems with whom those who are engaging in services interface.</li> <li>• Accept responsibility for continuing education and professional development as part of their commitment to provide quality services.</li> <li>• Become familiar with local resources for self-sufficiency, including benefits and employment opportunities and supportive resources for families, parents, and caregivers.</li> </ul>
<b>Mutuality</b>	<p>Peer Support Specialists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage in a relationship of mutual responsibility where power is shared and the Peer Support Specialist and the persons engaging in services are equally responsible for maintaining a peer relationship that is mutually beneficial.</li> <li>• Take responsibility for voicing their own needs and feelings.</li> <li>• Make decisions in collaboration with persons served and do not make decisions for persons engaging in services.</li> <li>• Ensure that people give and take the lead in discussions, everyone is offered a chance to speak, and decisions are made in collaboration with one another.</li> </ul>
<b>Reciprocity</b>	<p>Peer Support Specialists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the relationship is reciprocal. Every participant in the peer relationship both gives and receives in a fluid, constantly changing dynamic.</li> <li>• Belief that peer relationships are not hierarchical; no one is more qualified, advanced, or better than another.</li> <li>• Learn from each other.</li> <li>• View asking for help as reaching across (not up nor down).</li> </ul>
<b>Strengths-Based</b>	<p>Peer Support Specialists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide strength-based services acknowledging that every person has skills, gifts, and talents they can use to better their lives.</li> <li>• Focus on what is strong, not what is wrong.</li> </ul>

## Wellness, Recovery and Resiliency

- Assist others to identify these strengths and explore how those identified strengths can be used for their benefit.

### Peer Support Specialists:

- Engage in and model regular self-care activities.
- Communicate and behave in ways that promote wellness, recovery, and resiliency.
- Use language that reflects wellness, recovery, and resiliency principles.
- Shall not impose limitations on the possibility for wellness, recovery, and resiliency of those engaging in services.
- Recognize the importance of supportive relationships and community in wellness, recovery and resiliency and encourage persons to identify and develop natural supports.
- Promote self-sufficiency in the wellness, recovery, and resiliency journey.

Wellness is the conscious and deliberate process of creating and adapting patterns of behavior that lead to improved health in the following wellness dimensions: Emotional, Financial, Social, Spiritual, Educational/Occupational, Physical, Intellectual, and Environmental.

Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential. This process of change recognizes cultural diversity and inclusion and honors the different routes to resilience and recovery based on the individual and their cultural community.

Resiliency is an inner capacity that, when nurtured, facilitated, and supported, empowers individuals and communities to successfully meet life's challenges with a sense of self-determination, mastery and hope.



**By signing below, I agree not to violate, or assist in or abet the violation of, or conspire to violate, any provision or term of this Code of Ethics. All Peer Support Specialists shall be notified, in writing, of any changes to this Code of Ethics.**

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**Name (printed)**

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**Name (signature)**  
**Date (mm/dd/yyyy)**