



North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialist Program

Overview

North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialists (NCCPSS) are people living in recovery from mental illness and/or substance use disorder who support others who can benefit from their experiences. They have met North Carolina eligibility requirements, completed training, and are certified through an application process.

Certification Process

The NCCPSS Program certifies applicants who meet the eligibility criteria and are in recovery from a significant mental illness and/or substance use disorder. Certification means that the Program acknowledges that the peer has met the requirements to support individuals with mental health or substance use disorder. The Program certifies peers for two years, and the NCCPSS is responsible for maintaining their certification by renewing their certificate by the due date.

Reciprocity with Other States

The NCCPSS Program does not accept certification from other states and does not have reciprocity with other states regarding certification. CPSS from other states **MUST** follow the requirements for certification to process their NC certification.

Certificates

The NCCPSS Program mails approved certificates to the address submitted by the applicant on the application form. If an applicant changes address while processing certification, they **MUST** contact the Program to update their information to ensure timely receipt of their certificate. The Program staff will make **ONE** attempt to contact an applicant regarding a returned certificate.

Designation (Optional)

Applicants interested in the Military designation may review the information under [designations](#) for the required documents. Other designations (such as [COAPS](#)) require applicants to be a NCCPSS before completing training for that designation.

Eligibility

The NCCPSS Program requires all applicants for certification to meet the following program eligibility requirements:

- Must be 18 years or older
- Have lived experiences and in recovery from a serious mental illness and/or substance use disorder
- Must be in recovery for at least **ONE** year
- Have a high school diploma or equivalent

Serious Mental Illness (SMI)

The National Institute of Mental Health defines [Serious Mental Illness](#) (SMI) as, "A mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder resulting in serious functional impairment, which substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities." The burden of mental illnesses is particularly concentrated among those who experience disability due to SMI. Based on this definition, not all conditions experienced by individuals may be considered SMI.

SMI may be grouped under the following categories:

- Mood disorders – E.g., depressive disorders, bipolar disorders
- Anxiety disorders – E.g., posttraumatic stress disorder
- Psychotic Disorders – E.g., schizophrenia, delusional disorder, schizoaffective disorder

Substance Use Disorders (SUD)

The National Institute of Mental Health defines [Substance Use Disorder](#) (SUD) as, "A treatable mental disorder that affects a person's brain and behavior, leading to their inability to control their use of substances like legal or illegal drugs, alcohol, or medications." Examples of substance use are:

- Alcohol
- Marijuana
- Tobacco
- Opioids
- Cocaine
- Methamphetamine

The emphasis is on the disabling aspect of mental illness and substance use disorders. The illness must significantly affect the person's thinking, emotional state, and behavior. The condition must disrupt the person's ability to work, carry out daily activities, or engage in satisfying relationships.

Recovery

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines [Recovery](#) as, "Recovery signals a dramatic shift in the expectation for positive outcomes for individuals who experience mental and substance use conditions or the co-occurring of the two." SAMHSA outlined four dimensions of recovery as follows:

- Health - Overcoming or managing one's disease(s) or symptoms and making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional well-being.
- Home - Having a stable and safe place to live.
- Purpose - Conducting meaningful daily activities, such as a job, school volunteerism, family caretaking, or creative endeavors, and the independence, income, and resources to participate in society.
- Community - Having relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope.

The NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Services (DMH/DD/SUS) in the State Peer Support Service definition states, "Recovery is a process of change through which an individual improves their health and wellness, lives a self-directed life and strives to reach their full potential; to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities." The State also defines the following concepts relevant to recovery:

- Self-Determination - the right of an individual to direct their own services, to make decisions concerning their health and well-being, and to have help to make decisions from whomever they choose.
- Self-Advocacy - identifying and purposefully asking for what one needs.
- Health - learning to overcome, manage or more successfully live with the symptoms and making healthy choices that support one's physical and emotional well-being.
- Community - Developing and building upon relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope.

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Recovery is a process that means different things to different people. Similarly, recovery is personal, and the individual may use various tools or pathways to achieve positive outcomes. The NCCPSS Program acknowledges many pathways to recovery, including harm reduction. Below are the paths to recovery and examples recognized by the NCCPSS Program.

- Clinical Pathways - Recovery procedures are supported by the expertise of a healthcare provider, clinician, or other qualified professionals.
 - Medication Therapy
 - Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT)
 - Counseling

- Non-Clinical Pathways - Recovery procedures are peer-supported and frequently based in the community but do not include a licensed clinician.
 - Faith-Based recovery
 - Peer-Support services

- Self-Management - Recovery processes may be considered "natural recovery" because they do not involve conventional services.
 - Spontaneous Recovery

Application Process – Required Documents

Applicants must submit documents for the following:

Training

- Approved Course Training Certificate (Certification must be completed within two years of completing the training, i.e., two years starting from the date of training completion as recorded on the Approved Course training certificate)

- Additional Training (Training certificates must add up to 20 hours and must occur after the last certification or recertification date if lapsed in the past).
 - All training must be related to human service, mental health, substance use, and/or Peer Support: such training can include (but not limited to), Wellness Recovery Action Planning (WRAP), Person-Centered Thinking, Personal Assistance in Community Existence (PACE), and Crisis Prevention.
 - A maximum of eight (8) hours of training related to children and families will be accepted.
 - Applicants can also use college coursework if related to the work of NCCPSS and will enhance the ability to provide services to people with mental health and/or substance use disorder. The applicant must submit an official transcript for review with the application either in a sealed envelope from the College or electronically emailed to nccpssprogram@unc.edu.
 - Required Ethics Training: Effective July 1, 2024, the NCCPSS Program requires the completion of three (3) hours of Ethics Training for certification as follows:
 - New Applicants applying for certification must submit 3 hours of ethics training, which will be counted towards the 20 additional hours of training required for certification. The new policy mandate aims to ensure that every NCCPSS understands ethics in general and the NCCPSS Code of Ethics. The NCCPSS Program has a [list of training](#) approved for NCCPSS to meet this requirement. All

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

applicants must submit to the Program a certificate of completion for all approved training(s) they participate in.

- To review the updated guidelines, visit the [NCCPSS website](#).

Education

- Submit proof of Level of Education (Copy of High School Diploma, copy of GED Certificate or Degree, or Official College Transcript (sealed and signed by the college or emailed to nccpssprogram@unc.edu)

Code of Ethics

- Submit a signed copy of the [Code of Ethics Form](#)

Reference Letters (Two)

- Submit two reference letters completed by a person who is at least 18 years, has known you for at least a year, and can speak to your recovery.

Application Fee

- A non-refundable processing fee of \$20.00. This can be paid by a Cashier's check, or a money order can be made to "PSS-BHS" OR pay [online](#).

Designation (Optional)

- Military Designation
 - Submit a copy of a DD214 or Military ID as proof of experience in the military in addition to the other Program requirements.
- Certified Older Adults Peer Specialist (COAPS)
 - Submission of a copy of NCCPSS certificate
 - Submission of a copy of COAPS training certificate

Application Submission

Applicants **MUST** have all training certificates and documents ready to submit when they apply. Applications are accepted by mail or online only. Please Do **NOT** bring applications to the office! Your application will **NOT** be accepted in person. **There is NO exception to this policy.**

The NCCPSS Program encourages applicants to submit their application using the **ONLINE** [submission portal](#). Due to the volume of applications submitted through the mail, the NCCPSS Program is adjusting the processing time for mail applications from 5-7 business days to 7-10 business days. If you want your application processed within 3-5 business days, please submit it using the **ONLINE** portal.

Online Application

- Application Form
 - Create an account from the [website](#)
 - Complete the [application form](#)

NC DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

- Upload all required training certificates
- Reference Letters
 - Provide contact information for references
- Application Fee
 - Pay the application fee [online](#)

Mailed Application

- An applicant must ensure that all required forms are completed and signed
 - Application Form
 - Signed Code of Ethics Form
 - Copies of training certificates
 - Proof of education
- Reference letters
 - Signed across the seal at the back of the envelope
 - Letters may be submitted independently of the package
- Application Fee
 - Check or money order for \$20 (May be paid [online](#))
- The complete application packet and check or money order are mailed to:

**North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialist Program
School of Social Work, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
325 Pittsboro Street Campus Box #3550
Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27599-3550**

Application Processing Timeline

Please note that due to the high influx of applications, the processing time depends on how you submit (online or by mail) a complete application packet. Incomplete applications will delay the process. To check the status of your certification/recertification, please visit the [Credential Verification](#) page and search your name to verify.

Incomplete Applications

Applicants unable to complete their certification within six (6) months of beginning the certification process will have to resubmit their application (provide all documents needed for certification) as a new certification.