



National Certified Peer Specialist (NCPS) REQUIREMENTS

Peer support is a process through which people who share common experiences or face similar challenges come together as equals to give and receive help based on the knowledge that comes through shared experience.¹

The **National Certified Peer Specialist (NCPS)** credential offered by the National Certification Board for Behavioral Health Professionals (NCBBHP) is an advanced credential focused on the knowledge and skills peer specialists need to build the capacity of others to achieve and maintain recovery from a mental health condition or other behavioral health challenge. Peer specialists have the lived experience that is critical to providing this support. Though no two people walk the same pathway to recovery, comparable lived experience creates a foundation of trust and compatibility between peer specialists and the individuals they assist. While the NCPS credential does not define or measure this lived experience, it does require specific competencies that enable the peer specialist to advocate for, mentor, and support recovery in an ethical and professional manner.

Most NCPS applicants have already been credentialed by their state, and the NCPS credential does not replace such state-level credentials. Instead, the NCPS credential signifies that an individual with significant work experience as a peer specialist, who currently provides peer services, seeks to demonstrate their advanced competency in the field. The requirements that applicants for the NCPS credential must fulfill include training, supervised paid or volunteer work experience, letters of recommendation, and a passing score on the NCPS multiple-choice exam. NCPS certification may be renewed every two years if annual continuing education requirements have been met and a renewal fee is paid.

This document describes the requirements and application process for the NCPS credential and its renewal. The NCBBHP general certification policies and procedures, as well as the Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct, are posted on the NCBBHP website at www.behavioralhealthprofessional.com.

Disclaimer: The NCPS is not a clinical credential; the scope of practice does not entitle individuals to engage in to establish an independent peer specialist practice. Further, each state has different requirements for the delivery of peer services and in some instances, the NCPS may only serve as an indicator of advanced competency.

¹ Riessman, F. (1989). *Restructuring help: A human services paradigm for the 1990's*. New York, NY: National Self-help Clearinghouse.

APPLICATION STEPS

STEP 1: COMPLETE AND SUBMIT THE ONLINE APPLICATION

The NCPS online application is on the NCBHP website at www.behavioralhealthprofessional.com. The complete application process is as follows:

- Create an NCPS online application or continue with an existing application to provide the NCBHP with basic information about you.
- Upload a copy of your high school diploma, general equivalency degree (GED), or unofficial college transcript.
- Identify current and/or past employers or volunteer supervisors who will verify your work experience. Then, download the required *Verification of Supervised Work Experience Form* from the NCBHP website at www.behavioralhealthprofessional.com. Send a copy of the form to each person who will verify your experience and ask them to complete and submit the form to the NCBHP on your behalf.
- Download and complete the *Training Requirement and Documentation Form*. Then, submit the form and supporting documents to the NCBHP to demonstrate that you have fulfilled the training requirement.
- Identify individuals who will write a letter of recommendation in support of your NCPS application. Then, download the required *NCPS Recommendation Form* from the NCBHP website at www.behavioralhealthprofessional.com. Send a copy of the form to each person who will provide a recommendation and ask them to complete and submit the form to the NCBHP on your behalf.
- Pay the non-refundable application fee. Once the NCBHP receives your payment, it will process your application.
- Monitor your email and take action to resolve questions from the NCBHP related to your application.

STEP 2: CONNECT WITH YOUR CERTIFICATION SPECIALIST

After submitting the online application and paying your fee, you will be assigned a Certification Specialist who will assist you through the credentialing process. Your Certification Specialist will contact you within 30 business days after you submit your application. Most of your communication with the Certification Specialist will be through email. Please monitor your email for messages and automatic system-generated emails as your application is processed. You may also call the NCBHP office to speak directly to your Certification Specialist.

STEP 3: TAKE THE NCPS EXAM

The NCPS exam is a 125-item, multiple-choice test that is administered online with a live proctor. An overview of the exam process is provided below. Your Certification Specialist will provide detailed exam information when your NCPS application is approved.

After the NCBHP approves your NCPS application and all supporting documentation, your Certification Specialist will initiate the exam pre-registration process. When the pre-registration activities are complete, the NCBHP will send you an email with directions for downloading the appropriate software and preparing for the remote exam administration.

Applicants who fail the exam may re-test every 30 calendar days. Please contact your Certification Specialist for re-testing directions and fees.

STEP 4: HOLD NCPS CERTIFICATION

The NCBHP issues the NCPS credential after the applicant earns a passing score on the exam. The credential is issued for a two-year period and requires continuing education and renewal fee payment to maintain. Detailed information about maintenance and renewal of certification is provided with the credential award notice.

NCPS CREDENTIAL REQUIREMENTS

The education, training, work experience, recommendations, and exam requirements are described in the table below.

Requirement	
Formal Education	Hold a high school diploma, general equivalency degree, or higher.
Content-Specific Training	<p>Complete 40 hours of training related to the NCPS competencies. The NCPS training requirement can be met in one of the following ways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Hold a state or other jurisdiction peer support credential that requires a minimum of 40 hours of training in peer support competencies. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (2) Complete an NCBHP-approved 40-hour peer specialist training program. <p>OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (3) Complete and document a total of 40 hours of training on peer support competencies distributed across the following performance domains: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Advocacy: 4 hours b. Mentoring: 6 hours c. Recovery Support: 6 hours d. Cultural and Linguistic Competence: 2 hours e. Motivational Interviewing: 4 hours f. Vicarious Trauma/Self Care: 2 hours g. Whole Health: 8 hours h. Electives: 8 hours <p>Complete eligible training within 5 years of your application.</p>
Supervised Work Experience	Complete and document 2,000 hours of supervised paid or volunteer work providing peer support/peer specialist services within 5 years of your NCPS application.
Recommendations	Identify three individuals to provide a professional letter of recommendation for NCPS certification.
Exam	Earn a passing score on the NCPS multiple-choice exam.

DOCUMENTATION AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants must submit documentation showing they have fulfilled each credential requirement, as specified below.

Requirement	Mandatory Documents
Formal Education	<p>Applicants must submit documentation of their highest level of formal education by uploading a copy of their high school diploma, general equivalency degree, or higher to their online application.</p> <p><i>Unofficial transcripts may be used to meet the formal education requirement.</i></p>
Content-Specific Training	<p>Applicants must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) complete the <i>NCPS Verification of Training Form</i> listing each training event claimed for certification credit. (2) create a computer file containing the training certificate(s) that document completion of each training event entered on the <i>NCPS Verification of Training Form</i>. (3) upload the <i>NCPS Verification of Training Form</i> and the computer file of training certificates to the online application.
Supervised Work Experience	<p>Applicants must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) provide information in the online application each employer or volunteer supervisor who will verify the applicant’s fulfillment of the supervised work experience requirement. (2) download and send the <i>NCPS Supervised Work Experience Form</i> to each employer or volunteer supervisor who will verify the applicant has met the supervised work experience requirement. <p>Note that employers/supervisors must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) complete the provided <i>NCPS Supervised Work Experience Form</i>, including an official position description or letter attesting to the applicant’s work/volunteer roles. (2) submit the <i>NCPS Supervised Work Experience Form</i> and supporting documentation directly to the NCBHP to attach to the application. (3) respond to any requests from the NCBHP for further information, if necessary.
Recommendations	<p>Applicants must:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Identify three individuals to provide the NCBHP with a professional recommendation for NCPS certification. (2) Download and send the <i>NCPS Recommendation Form</i> to each person who will complete the form. (3) Ask each person to complete the form and send it directly to the NCBHP to attach to the NCPS application. The NCPS will not accept recommendations from the applicant.
Exam	<p>The applicant may register for the NCPS exam after the NCBHP approves all application and supporting documents. Your Certification Specialist will provide detailed directions to register and sit for the exam when this approval is granted.</p>

CREDENTIAL AWARD, ONGOING REQUIREMENTS, AND RENEWAL

NCPS credentials are awarded year-round, and expire every two years, on October 31. To maintain the NCPS credential, it is necessary to comply with the NCBHP Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct, complete continuing education hours every year, and pay a renewal fee every two years. More information about credential issuance, continuing education requirements, and credential renewal is provided in the table below.

Requirement	
Credential Award & Issue Date	After approving the NCPS application and supporting documents, the NCBHP awards the credential in certified status for a two-year period. The issue date is generated after the completed credential application is approved in the NCBHP system.
Expiration Dates & Renewal	<p>Credentials are issued year-round, so the first expiration date may be slightly more or less than two full years. The initial expiration date is calculated from the month the credential is awarded.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credentials issued in the months of August, September, or October will expire on October 31, two years after the current calendar year. • Credentials issued in November through July will expire on October 31, one year after the current calendar year. <p>After the first renewal, the credential may be renewed every two years, on October 31.</p>
Continuing Education	<p>NCPS' are required to complete 10 hours of continuing education every year for a total of 20 hours each two-year renewal period. Continuing education content must be related to at least one of the NCPS performance domains.</p> <p>Continuing Education credits or hours must be non-repetitive, that is, the same course cannot be claimed more than once during each two-year credential period, even if the course is taken annually.</p>
Ethical & Professional Conduct	NCPS' are expected to comply with the policies and procedures of the NCBHP Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct, located on the FCB website at www.behavioralhealthprofessional.com .
Renewal	NCPS' must pay a renewal fee once every two years; this fee may be paid between August 1 and October 31 of the renewal year.

FEES

Product	Fee	Frequency
NCPS Online Application	\$150	One time
NCPS Exam Fee	\$150	Every exam attempt
Proctoring Fee	\$35	Every exam attempt
NCPS Biennial Renewal	\$200	Every two years

EXAMPLES OF ELIGIBLE TRAINING TOPICS

The following are examples of training topics that can be used to fulfill the credential training requirements by domain. This list does not mean all topics must be acquired. Topics will vary depending upon the background of the applicant.

Domain	Examples of Eligible Training Topics
Advocacy (4 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma • Social injustice issues relating to factors such as race, culture, sexual orientation, class, disability • Protecting rights • Advocacy strategies to support peers • Influencing and negotiation • Empowerment strategies • Fostering self-advocacy skills among persons served • Concept of self-determination and how to support it
Mentoring (6 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing and terminating the peer relationship • Effective methods to tell personal recovery story • Building supportive relationships • Role-modeling • Inspiring hope • Group process and facilitation • Educational methods • Interpersonal communication principles and methods • Use of person-first language • Wellness planning • Teaching practical living skills, personal care, etc. • Recognizing and fostering resilience
Recovery Support (6 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principles of recovery • Processes of recovery and change • Recovery capital • Developing recovery goals and plans • Triggers for mental health symptoms and abuse of substances • Medication (side effects, management) • Trauma-informed services • Person-centered principles and practices • Resource linkage/making referrals • Collaboration methods • Use of self-help groups and other recovery support services • Use of natural support systems • Crisis situations and strategies for intervention

Domain	Examples of Eligible Training Topics
Cultural and Linguistic Competence (2 hours)	<p>Eligible training will reflect these concepts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Linguistic Competence</u>: Providing readily available, culturally appropriate oral and written language services to limited English proficiency (LEP) members through such means as bilingual/bicultural staff, trained medical interpreters, and qualified translators. • <u>Cultural Competence</u>: A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency or among professionals that enables effective interactions in a cross-cultural framework. • <u>Cultural and Linguistic Competence</u>: The ability of health care providers and health care organizations to understand and respond effectively to the cultural and linguistic needs brought by the patient to the health care encounter. • Cultural competence requires organizations and their personnel to Value diversity; assess themselves; manage the dynamics of difference; acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge; and adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of individuals and communities served.
Motivational Interviewing (4 hours)	<p>Eligible training will reflect these concepts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivational Interviewing is a clinical approach that helps people with mental health and substance use disorders and other chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular conditions, and asthma make positive behavioral changes to support better health. The approach upholds four principles— expressing empathy and avoiding arguing, developing discrepancy, rolling with resistance, and supporting self-efficacy (client’s belief s/he can successfully make a change).
Vicarious Trauma/Self-care (2 hours)	<p>Eligible training will reflect these concepts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The term vicarious trauma, sometimes also called compassion fatigue, is the latest term that describes the phenomenon associated with the “cost of caring” for others. Other terms used for compassion fatigue are secondary traumatic stress and secondary victimization. It is believed that professionals who work with trauma survivors experience vicarious trauma because of the work they do. Developing an adequate self-care strategy is key to preventing or overcoming vicarious trauma.
Professional Responsibility (4 hours)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal, state & other governing laws and regulations • Ethics, values, and professional conduct/Codes of Conduct • Philosophy of peer support • Boundary issues • Confidentiality • Documentation • Using supervision/consultation
Whole Health (8 hours)	<p>Eligible training will reflect these concepts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WRAP • WHAM • Peer Whole Health and Resilience
Electives (8 hours)	<p>The content for elective training hours may relate to any of the above performance domains or to addiction, mental health, or veteran/family/youth peer services.</p>