

# PREPARING PEER SUPPORT FOR CRISIS SERVICES: WASHINGTON



**“Being there and connected, peer counselors know when someone is going into a crisis. They can help consumers resolve problems before they become crises.”**

—Maureen Bailey, Project Director

## VISION

Concurrent opportunities sparked the expansion of peer support services in crisis care and with it, access to training. With Governor Jay Inslee’s announcement of a five-year plan to dramatically reshape how and where people experiencing symptoms of acute mental health conditions are treated, Washington’s Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) worked with community agencies to develop capacity and treatment services that deflect crises response from law enforcement to mental health agencies. Also in 2019, the Trueblood settlement was reached in a case challenging lengthy delays in competency restoration services. Lastly, DBHR is planning for a dramatic rise in referrals to care from the implementation of 988 in 2022. To meet these challenges, DBHR is enhancing crisis triage/stabilization and mobile crisis services that improve response times, increasing collaboration, providing law enforcement with opportunities to connect individuals to treatment instead of the justice system, and adding certified peer counselors. To expand and better prepare its workforce, DBHR is creating a 40-hour virtual training for peer support counselors. DBHR used TTI funds to create the prequel to that educational program

— *Peer Support for Crisis Services* is a seven module, 2.5 hour, on-line virtual training that is free and accessible to anyone. The training was designed with the input of peers, peer counselors, managed care organizations, mobile crisis teams and in partnership with the Peer Workforce Alliance.

## JAIL DIVERSION APPROACH

Peer counselors serve in a variety of settings that intersect with law enforcement, justice, and correctional systems that include mobile crisis teams, court settings, crisis stabilization units, and hospital emergency departments. Understanding the linkage between these different settings and their services enable peer counselors to consider alternatives to prevent or reduce justice involvement.

## MEASURING PROGRESS

*Peer Support for Crisis Services* launched in early 2022. In this short time, 300 peers have registered and 53 have completed the modules. 123 are in the process of completing the course. ▶

## PEER SUPPORT COUNSELOR ONLINE

Are you ready to become a peer counselor? Take the online course and complete the training application.

Complete the application online



### INTEGRATION WITH CRISIS SYSTEM

Peer counselors are integral to crisis systems in Washington. Working in community mental health centers, they assist consumers to prevent problems from growing into crises. Peer counselors work in crisis response settings including hospital emergency departments, mobile crisis teams, and crisis stabilization units in every region of the state and operate a statewide warmline. Two peer run crisis respite settings are opening in 2022 that will provide more alternatives to hospital emergency departments and inpatient settings.

### BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EQUITY

DBHR recognized the homogeneity of peer counselors in the state and is encouraging broader recruitment efforts to bring on more black, indigenous, and people of color. *Peer Support for Crisis Services* encourages peer counselors to see each individual as unique and to avoid making cultural assumptions based on preconceptions. Peers are trained to ask questions about how they can best support individuals in their recovery. The free virtual training platform has made this training available to people in every part of the state.

### PROJECT LEGACY

*Peer Support for Crisis Services* will continue to be available to anyone, whether in or outside the state, to orient users to the crisis system as well as the role of peer support counselors in those settings. It also provides the critical orientation to the full 40 peer support counselor certification training that is in development.

### WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM WASHINGTON'S PEER SUPPORT FOR CRISIS SERVICES TRAINING?

The training was designed with input from many people with lived experience. Those who participated and were not representing an agency could request compensation for time and travel. Many withdrew from the process after initial focus groups and brainstorming sessions, particularly youth, whose perspective may have been missed. In projects like this that require broad representation over the long term, staff will invite even greater participation and plan for attrition as the time and work required towards completion become more demanding.

For more information on this project contact Melodie Pazolt at [Melodie.Pazolt@hca.wa.gov](mailto:Melodie.Pazolt@hca.wa.gov).