

# Employment Outcomes After Certification

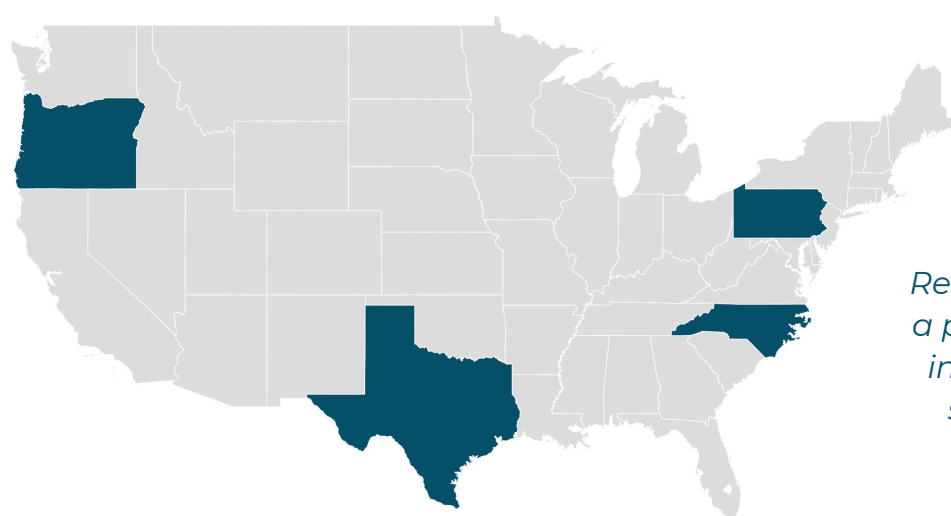
*As a Behavioral Health Peer Specialist in Four U.S. States*

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## About the Study

- The study followed a cohort of nearly 600 certified peer specialists (CPS) to examine career outcomes post certification.
- CPSs were followed over three years. Self-reported survey data were collected online using Qualtrics in three waves: March-October 2020; March-November 2021; and May-October 2022.
- By recruiting CPSs at the point of certification rather than the workplace, researchers could examine differences between peer support and non peer support jobs over time.

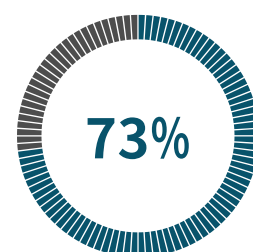


*Respondents had completed a peer specialist certification in one of four participating states: NC, OR, PA, or TX.*

## Findings

### Employment

- The cohort experienced high levels of continuous employment from 2020 to 2022 (73%-77%), particularly for those with more prior work experience.
- Older age, Social Security Disability Insurance beneficiary status, and past year use of outpatient mental health therapy or inpatient hospitalization were associated with a lower likelihood of employment.



### Wages and Benefits

- Wages of CPSs working in both peer support (PS) and non-peer support (NP) positions increased significantly since 2020, but wage increases were significantly lower in PS jobs than NP by 2022.
- Across all study years PS jobs were more likely to offer fringe benefits than NP jobs.
- Compared to published data on wages of Community and Social Service occupations, PS jobs are paid relatively less, with peer specialists receiving lower pay than workers who perform similar tasks but do not have lived experience.



### Financial Wellbeing

- Financial well-being did not improve significantly over time for workers in either PS or NP positions, despite the increase in wages for both groups over time.

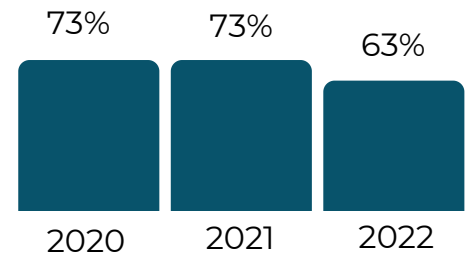
- This finding mirrors trends reported by the U.S. Federal Reserve showing that financial well-being has declined in the general population and is at the lowest point since 2016. Thus, study participants may reflect a larger national trend and not an exception to it.



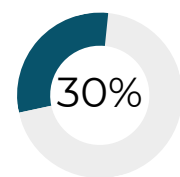
## Peer Support and Non-Peer Support Jobs

- Among those employed, the proportion working in peer support jobs declined significantly from 2020 to 2022, suggesting that a proportion left the field for other types of employment.

**Employed in Peer Support**

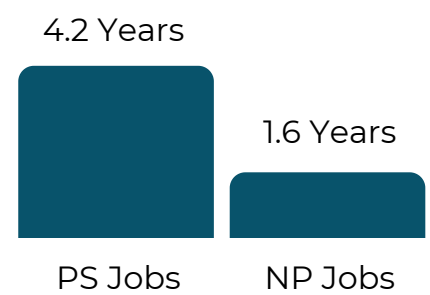


- Almost a third of the “non-peer support” jobs were in the occupational category of Community and Social Services, with the remainder spread across a range of occupational categories.



- Respondents with depressive disorders or schizophrenia spectrum disorders were more likely to work in peer support than other job types.
- Use of outpatient medication management services (indicating use of prescribed psychiatric medications) and better self-reported physical health were associated with greater likelihood of peer support employment.
- Job tenure was longer for PS than NP jobs, and tenure increased each year among PS jobs, but not among NP jobs. This suggests that participants may have switched from PS to NP jobs.

**Tenure in 2022, by Job Type**



## Conclusions

Following certification as peer specialists, people experience high levels of continuous employment across time in both peer and non-peer positions.

While job satisfaction and stability may retain portions of the peer support workforce, a segment of this workforce may be leaving to take non-peer jobs, depleting the behavioral health system of a much-needed resource for delivering evidence-based care.

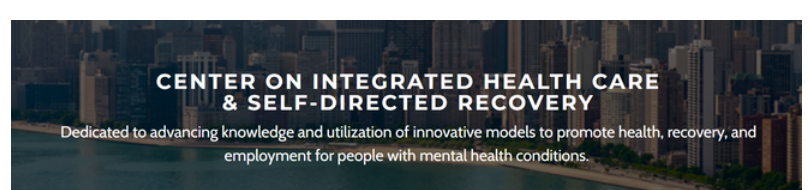
Findings related to financial well-being and wages point to the potential of employer-level interventions to reduce turnover among peer providers.

## Citations

Ostrow, L., Cook, J. A., Salzer, M. S., Pelot, M., & Burke-Miller, J. K. (2022). Employment outcomes after certification as a behavioral health peer specialist in four U.S. states. *Psychiatric Services*, 73(11), 1239–1247. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.202100651>

Ostrow, L., Cook, J. A., Salzer, M. S., Pelot, M., & Burke-Miller, J. K. (2023). Multi-state survey of Wages and financial well-being of Mental Health Peer Specialists. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 58(3), 329–338. <https://doi.org/10.3233/jvr-230021>

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