Standards for Foundational Training for Harm Reduction Peer Workers

Foundational Training Statement of Intent
One of the objectives under the AIDS Institute’s (AI) “Ending the Epidemic” (ETE) Initiative is to develop a statewide peer credentialing program for HIV/HCV/harm reduction workers. There is documented evidence that involvement of peer workers in the care of people with HIV, HCV, and substance use helps to improve patient health outcomes, increase rates of HIV viral suppression which, in turn, helps to prevent new cases of HIV infection. The effectiveness of peer-delivered services is rooted in the notion that peers have a “shared lived experience” with other clients and are able to motivate and communicate in ways that are highly effective. In order to assist other clients and participants, peer workers must be in a position where they have “done their own work” and can function as “role models” for other patients.

Foundational training provides an opportunity for people with HIV, HCV, who have a history of mental health issues and/or substance use, and/or come from marginalized communities to gain a better understanding and mastery of their own health care, wellness and treatment. These preparatory/readiness trainings encourage participants to understand the key components of their own wellness, can address ongoing issues related to recovery, treatment adherence and in some cases, can navigate complex systems of health and behavioral health care. Completion of foundational training is a necessary first step to certification for many potential peer workers.

Harm Reduction Foundational Training Programs can be offered to a wide range of participants, including: 1) those currently interested in progressing toward peer certification and employment as a peer worker; 2) those who may benefit from the program for individual growth and education but who have are unsure of their interest in peer certification or serving as a peer worker; or 3) those who may benefit from the program for individual growth or education who have no current or future plans to seek certification or career opportunities.

The following standards provide guidance on the topics, supports and criteria providers are encouraged to consider when offering a Harm Reduction Foundational Training Program for persons preparing for peer work in a Harm Reduction setting and/or working with people whose lives has been affected by drug use and/or has included high risk sexual behaviors/sex work/commercial sex work.

The following components are required of a foundational training program for HR peer workers:

Agency Readiness to Provide Foundational Training for Harm Reduction Peer Workers
- Agencies must have strong ties to people whose lives has been affected by drug use and/or has included high risk sexual behaviors/sex work/commercial sex work and other providers who work with these communities in order to effectively recruit potential participants.
- Agencies must have at least two (2) years of experience delivering foundational, Harm Reduction, recovery readiness, self-management or empowerment training for people whose lives have been affected by drug use and/or has included high risk sexual behaviors/sex work/commercial sex work.

Objectives of the Training:
- Must have clearly defined objectives
- These objectives are consistent with the Roles and Responsibilities and Core Competencies of the Harm Reduction Peer Worker
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Classroom Sessions:
Frequency of sessions and time frame for the Harm Reduction Foundation Training Program can be determined by the program in consideration of the participants they serve and in consultation with NYSDOH. However, all essential topics are required to be covered to meet these standards.

Essential Topics to Be Covered
- Harm Reduction Overview
- Overdose Prevention & Response
- Syringe Access 101 (SEPs, ESAP, PDSE, Syringe disposal, etc)
- Safer Drug Use Strategies 101 (safer injecting, safer crack smoking, safer sniffing)
- Drugs 101
- Opioid Agonist Therapies 101 (Buprenorphine, Methadone, etc)
- Cultural competency (PWUD, Sex Workers/Industry, Formerly Incarcerated, LGBTQI)
- Hepatitis C & HIV 101
- Communication and listening skills
- Job readiness

Access to Support
- During Foundational training period, training programs must provide peers with access to additional support
- Examples include: Support groups, work in smaller teams, providing an individual mentor, counseling or other methods which supports participants to share experiences and affirm existing skills and knowledge in safe way to support learning

Participant Satisfaction/ Program Evaluation
- Opportunity for participants to provide feedback at key intervals
- Some mechanism in place to assess acquisition of knowledge, for example: reflective practice logs, pre & post tests

Self-Assessment and Feedback
Programs must have a process for:
- providing participants with feedback about their strengths and weaknesses relative to serving as a peer worker
- assisting participants in self-assessment of existing skills and skills acquired through the foundational training
- assisting participants in evaluating their level of interest and readiness to continue to pursue the goal of being a peer worker and access to further training/certification routes

Graduation/ Recognition of Completion
- Graduation Ceremony to mark completion of the program

Additional Recommended Features (Encouraged, But Not Required)
- Access to stipends for travel and food
- Experienced peers are involved in providing the classroom sessions