Standards of Foundational Training for HIV 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 patients, 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 or HCV who have a history of mental health issues and substance use and/ or come from marginalized communities to achieve a level of understanding and mastery of their own HIV/HCV/behavioral health care and treatment. These trainings ensure that participants understand the key components of their own HIV/HCV and behavioral health care, can address ongoing issues related to recovery, treatment adherence and 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.

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

Agency Readiness to Provide Foundational Training for HIV Peer Workers

- Agencies must have strong ties to people living with HIV and other providers in order to effectively recruit potential participants
- Agencies must have at least two years of experience delivering foundational, recovery readiness, self-management or empowerment training for people living with HIV

Objectives of the Training:

- Must have clearly defined objectives
- Objectives are consistent with the Roles and Responsibilities and Core Competencies of the HIV Peer Worker

Classroom Sessions:

- 6-8 weeks in length
- 2 to 4 sessions per week
- Half or full day sessions totaling at least 65 hours
- Includes didactic and experiential learning

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

New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute
Topics to Be Covered

- HIV transmission and non-transmission
- HIV prevention options, including PrEP and PEP
- HIV testing and the importance of knowing one’s HIV status
- Overview of the immune system
- HIV disease progression
- Importance of medical care for people living with HIV (PWHIV)
- Building a positive relationship with your medical provider
- Benefits of HIV treatment
- Skills for managing medications
- Importance of treatment adherence
- Setting personal recovery or wellness goals
- Maintaining commitment to HIV treatment/ wellness
- Addressing challenges to staying in care and wellness
- Self-management skills
- Managing side effects
- Recovery/ substance use treatment options/ relapse
- Mental health treatment options
- Managing stress and anxiety
- Past traumatic experiences and wellness/ accessing help to manage your past traumas
- Range of available social services and their importance in promoting wellness for PWHIV
- Managing your other health conditions
- NYS Confidentiality law
- Health literacy and communication skills
- Disclosure
- Nutrition
- Wellness and self-care
- Conflict management
- Job readiness
- Importance of advocacy

Participant Satisfaction/ Program Evaluation

- Opportunity for participants to provide feedback at key intervals
- Some mechanism in place to assess acquisition of knowledge

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
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