

New York State Certified Peer Worker Certification Program in HIV, Hepatitis C, Harm Reduction and PrEP Frequently Asked Questions

Who is eligible for certification?

Any person who has a qualifying lived experience with HIV, Hepatitis-C, Harm Reduction, PrEP or Criminal Justice is eligible for certification. A “lived experience” is defined as the experience someone has obtained from life; qualifying lived experiences are divided into four “tracks”.

What are the Peer Certification tracks?

The NYS Certified Peer Worker Program requires persons obtaining their certification to specialize into tracks of relevant peer experience. Specializing in a track requires you to take specific training courses that will qualify you and build “competencies”. A competency is the ability to do a task successfully and efficiently. There are several competencies for each track.

The **five** Peer Certification Tracks and their eligibility requirements are listed below:

1. **HIV**: a person must be living with HIV.
2. **Hepatitis C (HCV)**: a person must be living with Hep-C, currently receiving treatment for Hep-C, or have completed treatment for Hep-C.
3. **Harm Reduction (HR)**: a person must have lived experience of substance use, and have either:
 - 1) experience accessing harm reduction services from a syringe services program or opioid overdose prevention program, or 2) completed a practicum working in a syringe services program or opioid overdose prevention program.
4. **Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)**: a person who has lived experience of taking PrEP. To ensure an applicant for this track has enough lived experience, supervisors will be required to rate specific competencies related to a shared lived experience.
5. **Criminal Justice (CJ)**: a person who has lived experience with incarceration in a federal or state prison or county jail, and/or being on parole or probation, and/or being charged with a felony offense, including legal proceedings in drug court.

Please note individuals who are “affected” are not eligible for certification. However, a person who is living with HIV who does PrEP work may be certified as an HIV Peer Worker by completing a practicum and carrying out the competencies associated with PrEP.

Will I have to disclose my HIV, HCV, substance use history, criminal justice history or PrEP use to others?

It is expected that all persons seeking certification would be comfortable *strategically* sharing their relevant status and/or relevant life experience.

What is required of me to become certified?

- Completion of Foundational Training (optional, but recommended)
- Create a free account on <http://www.hivtrainingny.org>
- Select at least one of the specialization tracks: HIV, Hep-C, Harm Reduction, PrEP or Criminal Justice
- Complete 90 hours total of training, including the *Intro to Peer Work* training
- Completion of a supervised 500-hour work practicum carrying out the specific competencies related to your certification track (HIV, Hep-C, Harm Reduction or PrEP)
- Pass the on-line exam with a score of 75% or better
- Prepare a professional resume, which includes your practicum experience
- Complete the online application, and answer the three Lived Experience Questions
- Complete the Self-Care Worksheet
- Sign and uphold the Code of Ethics. (Please note: Anyone seeking certification is expected to follow the principles listed in the Code of Ethics that will guide peer workers in their roles, relationships, and scope of responsibility.)
- Receive final approval from the NYS Peer Worker Certification Review Board

What if I'm not ready to become certified?

Good news! You can take *Foundational Training*. Foundational Trainings are optional courses designed to help prepare you for Peer Certification. Please check the website for more information on where you can take Foundational Training courses. There are also many peer opportunities throughout our community that may not require certification.

When can I start an application?

You may start your application at any time by visiting <https://www.hivtrainingny.org/Home/PeerCertification> then clicking the box "Applicant Info" located on the right side of the page. You may go back to your application at any time to update information, or work on your Lived Experience questions. A completed application must be submitted before you can become certified.

How can I access Peer Certification related resources?

To access Peer Certification information and other resources visit <https://www.hivtrainingny.org/Home/PeerCertification>. You will find helpful resources like the Course Tracker Form and the Self Care Worksheet.

How do I know which trainings to take for the 90-hours of training?

On the <http://www.hivtrainingny.org> website, click on the Peer Certification tab. Once there, you can view the “Course Tracker Forms” at: <http://hivtrainingny.org/home/PeerCheckList>.

The Course Tracker Forms will let you know which courses to take and help you keep up to date of what you’ve completed. Each specialized track has its own Course Tracker Form.

We encourage you to print the tracking form, and recommend you use these forms to track your training hours.

When can I start taking training courses?

Any person pursuing certification is encouraged to begin taking courses as soon as possible.

How do I take the trainings?

You must first register for a training. To register, go to <http://www.hivtraininny.org> and login to your account:

1. Click on the “Course List” tab (Please make sure it’s a course you need for certification!)
2. Click the “register” button
3. Click the “select” button (you can see details about the training)
4. Finally, click the “submit” button

Your screen will show a Confirmation Notification and you will receive a confirmation e-mail from “HIV Training”. The confirmation e-mail will look similar to the image below:



Please pay special attention to where the training is being held, as it may not be your local area!

What if I need special accommodations to attend the training?

If you require special accommodations to attend the training, you can let us know by clicking the text at the bottom of the course registration page that asks, “Will you require accommodations under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) to participate in trainings?”

A box will open asking you to describe the special accommodations. Examples of special accommodations may include, but are not limited to:

- ASL – American Sign Language Interpretation
- Sitting in the front of the training room to see better
- Wheelchair accessible entrance, training space, and restrooms

Are any of the training courses mandatory?

Yes. The “Core Courses”, found on page 1 of the Course Tracker are mandatory.

What should I know about the 500-hour supervised practicum?

The practicum is an opportunity to practice the competencies, tasks and job duties of a peer worker. The practicum must be related to the track you select for certification (HIV, Hep- C, Harm Reduction, PrEP or Criminal Justice). Your 500 hours should be documented.

You must have a supervisor who is overseeing your practicum. The supervisor should give you regular feedback and must complete the **Supervisor Evaluation**. We recommend you complete the evaluation with your supervisor during the middle of your practicum, and once again towards the end of your practicum. This allows you both to see what competencies need improved before submitting the Supervisor Evaluation. For questions about the Supervisor Evaluation, call the Peer Certification Academic Center at 631-444-3209 or e-mail stephen.sebor@stonybrook.edu.

What if I’ve already been working or volunteering as a peer worker? Does that count?

Yes, that counts under certain circumstances. Experience as a peer worker must be **within three calendar years** of submission of your application, in order to count toward the required 500-hour practicum. For example, if you are submitting your application in September of 2024, all practicum experience must be after January 1, 2021. Your supervisor must document that you completed at least 500 hours after such time. If you have questions about your prior experience, please call the Peer Certification Academic Center at 631-444-3209.

What should I expect from the Peer Certification Online Exam?

The 30-question exam is available online, via a desktop computer, or mobile browser. Exam questions focus on the core and specialized competencies learned throughout your training and practicum and the Code of Ethics. You must receive a score of 75% or better to pass. You will have one hour to complete the exam. If you do not pass, you may re-take the exam up to three times per day. Comprehensive study guides have been developed for four tracks and are available at <https://www.hivtrainingny.org/PeerCert/StudyGuide>.

Is there anything I must do to keep my certification?

Yes. All Certified Peers Workers must maintain their certification by upholding the Code of Ethics and taking **Continuing Education Unit (CEU) training courses**. *Certified Peer Workers are required to take **10 hours of training every year and must have 20 hours of Continuing Education training every two years**.* The Certified Peer Worker is responsible for making sure they meet this requirement.

Certified Peer Workers can register to take additional trainings through the <http://www.hivtrainingny.org> website. The courses do not have to be track specific. Courses can be in-person or online. It is recommended that Certified Peer Workers take trainings relevant to peer work.

Certified Peer Workers who do not complete 20 Continuing Education training hours every two years will lose their Certification and will not be considered NYS Certified Peer Workers.

I have lived experience in more than one track (HIV/HCV/Harm Reduction/PrEP/Criminal Justice). Can I choose to specialize in more than one track?

Yes, you can, with one exception. Individuals certifying for the HIV track **cannot** certify for the PrEP track.

To certify in multiple tracks, you will need a minimum of 22 specialized course hours for each track. Some trainings count for multiple specializations, it may take less than an additional 22 hours of coursework to complete multiple tracks. Your practicum must include work relevant to all tracks you plan to certify in. You will also need to complete the online exam for **all** tracks you in which you want to become certified.

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Does becoming a Certified Peer Worker mean I will get a job?

No, becoming certified does not guarantee a job.

To assist Certified Peer Workers and persons pursuing certification with finding a job, the AIDS Institute has created a state-wide email list called “Peer Worker Employment Opportunities Mailing List”. This “listserv” sends out job announcements where you may find an employment opportunity. If you sign up to be on the listserv you will receive these announcements directly to your e-mail. To add your e-mail to the listserv, type it in the box located at the bottom right of any page on the <http://hivtrainingny.org> website, and click the button that says “Go”.

I need a specific course to complete my certification, but I can't find it anywhere! Help!

You can adjust the calendar on the <http://www.hivtrainingny.org> website. By default, you will see the next upcoming 30 days of training. There are buttons on the right to look at the next 60 or 90 days. You can even search by region. Please check the calendar often, as trainings are added all the time.

I'm on the waitlist for a course I need for peer certification. Help!

Please check with the training agency for wait-list policies. If this course is the last course you need for certification, please call the Peer Certification Academic Center at 631-444-3209 and we will try to get you into that course.

I've already taken some required courses for certification. Do I have to take them again?

Required courses must be taken **within three calendar years** of submission of your application for approval by the Review Board. For example, if you are submitting your application in May of 2024, all courses must be after January 1, 2021. This applies to **all classes**, including those taken on the <http://www.hivtrainingny.org> website as well as outside trainings, such as SafeTALK, the, Positive Self-Management Training or any of the equivalent trainings through the NYC Department of Health T-TAP. There may be some exceptions for online learning or archived webinars. **Remember: All certificates for outside trainings need to be uploaded to your online peer certification application.**

To check the courses, you have taken through the <http://www.hivtrainingny.org> website, log-in and click the “My Courses” link located on the right side. If you have questions about your prior coursework, please call the Peer Certification Academic Center at 631-444-3209.

Can I receive college credit for all this?

Yes, those who successfully become a NYS Certified Peer Worker qualify for 26-32 college credits through SUNY Empire State College. For more information you can check <https://www.hivtrainingny.org/FAQDocs/escfaq.pdf> or contact the Peer Certification Academic Center at 631-444-3209.

I'm an LTI Peer Mentor. Does this experience count towards my practicum?

No, LTI Peer Mentorship does not count towards your practicum.

Is there funding to support travel, hotels, meals, etc. for peer workers seeking certification?

Individuals seeking certification are encouraged to have an agency sponsor their travel to trainings. Typically, this is the agency where the peer worker is doing the practicum. There are very limited resources available from the AIDS Institute to support travel for trainings. Travel assistance is only available to individuals who are 1-2 courses away from completing their certification. Please write to stephen.sebor@stonybrook.edu to inquire.

Additional Questions or Need Assistance?

Call or e-mail:

Stephen Sebor at 631-444-3209 / stephen.sebor@stonybrook.edu

Justin LiGreci at justin.ligreci@health.ny.gov