

Date of Hearing: January 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 96 (Jackson) – As Amended January 5, 2026

Policy Committee: Health

Vote: 15 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill removes the requirement that an applicant for certification as a Medi-Cal peer support specialist (MCPSS) possess a high school diploma or equivalent.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

Absorbable costs to the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS).

**COMMENTS:**

1) **Purpose.** This bill is sponsored by Cal Voices. According to the author:

Requiring a high school diploma or equivalent may create artificial barriers to entry and limit access for individuals with the potential to excel in peer support roles. The lived experience of [MCPSSes] in recovering from mental illness and substance use disorders is a crucial component of their role, enabling them to save lives and empower individuals with behavioral health conditions to lead fulfilling lives.

2) **Background.** A certified MCPSS provides services under Medi-Cal programs for specialty mental health services and the Drug Medi-Cal Organized Delivery System (DMC-ODS). According to the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA), peer support workers are individuals who have lived experience with the process of recovery from behavioral health disorders, or family members of such individuals, and are dedicated to helping others facing similar challenges. Peer support workers' shared experiences with behavioral health disorders foster understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment, enabling them to effectively engage with and support individuals in their recovery journeys.

SB 903 (Beall), Chapter 150, Statutes of 2020, required DHCS to establish statewide MCPSS certification requirements. CalMHSA implements the MCPSS certification program on behalf of counties. To seek certification as an MCPSS, an individual must be at least 18 years old, possess a high school diploma or equivalent degree, and self-identify as having experience with the process of recovery as described above, among other characteristics. The certification process includes 80 hours of training and a certification exam, among other requirements.

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