

# Steps to Becoming a Certified Peer Wellness Specialist

## What is a Peer Wellness Specialist?

A Peer Wellness Specialist (PWS) is an individual who has lived experience with a psychiatric condition plus intensive training. A PWS works as part of a person-driven, health home team that integrates behavioral health and primary care to assist and advocate for individuals in achieving well-being. PWS is a worker type under the Traditional Health Worker umbrella.



## Traditional Health Worker

Traditional Health Workers (THWs) are trusted individuals from their local communities who may also share socioeconomic ties and lived life experiences with health plan members. THWs have historically provided person-centered and community-centered care by bridging communities and the health systems that serve them, increasing the appropriate use of care by connecting people with health systems, advocating for health plan members, supporting adherence to care and treatment, and empowering individuals to be agents in improving their own health.

## There are five types of Traditional Health Workers:

- 1 Birth Doulas
- 2 Community Health Workers (CHW)
- 3 Personal Health Navigators (PHN)
- 4 Peer Wellness Specialists (PWS)
- 5 Peer Support Specialists (PSS)
  - There are four categories of Peer Support Specialist: Youth Support Specialist, Family Support Specialist, Recovery Peer, and Mental Health Peer.

## THW Certification Steps

### ELIGIBILITY

- You must be at least 18 years old.
- You must not be listed on the Medicaid exclusion list.



## 1 Complete an OHA approved training

For Oregon Health Authority (OHA) Approved THW Training Programs, visit the Oregon Health Authority Office of Equity and Inclusion Website: <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/OEI/Pages/THW-Training-Programs.aspx>

### OR - APPLY FOR CERTIFICATION THROUGH THE LEGACY CLAUSE

If you have not been certified as a THW with the Oregon Health Authority, you can receive certification through credit for your prior training and work experience and completing Steps 2-4 below.

#### CREDIT FOR PRIOR TRAINING/WORK EXPERIENCE:

If you have worked or volunteered in the capacity of a Peer Wellness Specialist (PWS) or a similar role for at least 3,000 hours between January 1, 2008-June 30, 2025:

- Submit a letter of recommendation from your previous employer or organization. The letter should include verifiable evidence that you worked or volunteered in the capacity of a PWS and met the 3,000-hour requirement.

## 2 Complete the free oral health training requirement

- [Oregon Health Authority: Traditional Health Worker Oral Health Requirements](#)

Once you complete the training you will receive an email notification of completion. You will need to save this to submit with your THW application.

## 3 Complete the THW Certification application

The [Oregon Health Authority Health Work Force Registry Applicant Portal](#) is an efficient platform for applicants to apply, track, and manage certification for Traditional Health Workers. You can now create a new or renewal Traditional Health Worker application using this portal.

- Application for THW certification requires proof of the following materials:
  - Copy of your training certificate from an [OHA-approved training program](#) OR for Legacy Clause: Letter of recommendation and verifiable hours
  - Clear copy of a government-issued identification
  - Proof of Oral Health training

**NOTE:** Using the [Health Workforce Registry Portal](#) is the quickest method. If you need in-person assistance or have questions, please email [thw.program@odhsoha.oregon.gov](mailto:thw.program@odhsoha.oregon.gov) or call 971-673-3353 to schedule a virtual help session.

## 4 Complete your criminal background check

Once you have submitted your THW application and all supporting documents, you will receive an email with a link from the Background Check Unit (BCU) ORCHARDS requesting your permission to conduct a background check.

**NOTE:** These emails often end up in your junk/spam folder, so please continue to check those folders as well. If you do not receive an email within 1 to 2 weeks after submitting your THW application, and you have checked your spam folder for an email from “BCU ORCHARDS,” contact the OEI THW Program at [THW.program@ODHSOHA.oregon.gov](mailto:THW.program@ODHSOHA.oregon.gov)

- The background check process may take 4-8 weeks and all costs are covered by the Oregon Health Authority.
- Once submitted, CONTINUE to watch for emails in case more information is needed.
- Pay careful attention to the instructions in the email. You only have 21 days to complete the process. If you do not complete the process within 21 days, you will need to request a new link.
  - The background check is required even if you have had one in the past.
  - If you have lived outside of Oregon in the past five years, you will also need to submit fingerprints. There may be additional instances in which ORCHARDS requests fingerprints. Follow the instructions from ORCHARDS.
- OHA OEI THW program will notify you by email with a Determination Letter:
  - **IF APPROVED**, keep this email for your records. It contains your THW registration number and certification expiration date. Your certification is good for three years from date of issue. You will need to meet CEU requirements to recertify. OHA OEI will automatically add you to OHA's THW registry: [Home - Traditional Health Worker Registry \(oregon.gov\)](https://www.oregon.gov/oha/ohce/oei/thw/registries/home-traditional-health-worker-registry)
  - **IF DENIED**, ORCHARDS will notify you and provide instructions on how to appeal. The appeals process only involves you and ORCHARDS, and not OHA OEI.

## Continuing Education (CEUs) and Renewal of Certification

### THW CERTIFICATION IS VALID FOR THREE YEARS (36 MONTHS) FROM THE CERTIFICATION DATE.

During your certification or recertification period, in order to renew your certification for another three years, you must complete these Traditional Health Worker Continuing Education Requirements (950-060-0050):

#### CONTINUING EDUCATION UNITS

CEUs may either be received from an OHA-approved training program or any educational hours that support the individual THW's scope of work.

- To maintain certification status, all THWs shall complete at least 20 hours of Continuing Education training before the renewal date.
- All trainings must be OHA-approved trainings.
- Any "non-OHA-approved" trainings, seminars, and workshops may apply if they relate to the work you do, or are within the THW's scope of practice. It will need to be reviewed by OHA for approval. For questions on approved trainings, email OEI THW Programs: [thw.program@odhsoha.oregon.gov](mailto:thw.program@odhsoha.oregon.gov)
- 10 hours of the CEUs can be from an online course.
- 10 hours of the CEUs must be in person.
- Effective July 1, 2022, THWs are required to take three hours of Suicide Prevention Training as part of the required 20 CEUs.
- Continuing education hours above the total number required may not be carried over to the next renewal period.

Resources	Links
OHA Office of Equity and Inclusion: How to Become a THW	<a href="https://www.oregon.gov/oha/OEI/Pages/How-to-Become-a-THW.aspx">https://www.oregon.gov/oha/OEI/Pages/How-to-Become-a-THW.aspx</a>
Traditional Health Worker Toolkit	<a href="https://www.oregon.gov/oha/EI/THW%20Documents/Traditional-Health-Worker-Toolkit-2019-Final.pdf">https://www.oregon.gov/oha/EI/THW%20Documents/Traditional-Health-Worker-Toolkit-2019-Final.pdf</a>
Mental Health & Addiction Association of Oregon (MHA\O)	<a href="https://www.mhaoforegon.org/">https://www.mhaoforegon.org/</a>
Traditional Health Worker Oregon Administrative Rules (OAR) 950-060-0000	<a href="#">OAR 950-060-0000</a>
OHA THW Registry	<a href="#">Home - Traditional Health Worker Registry (oregon.gov)</a>
Oregon Health Authority Office of Equity and Inclusion THW program email	<a href="mailto:thw.program@odhsoha.oregon.gov">thw.program@odhsoha.oregon.gov</a>
Trillium THW Liaisons	<a href="mailto:THW@TrilliumCHP.com">THW@TrilliumCHP.com</a>
Trillium website	<a href="http://www.trilliumohp.com">www.trilliumohp.com</a>

For questions and/or assistance, please contact Trillium Community Health Plan’s THW Liaisons by email at [THW@TrilliumCHP.com](mailto:THW@TrilliumCHP.com) or by phone at 877-600-5472.

For Certified Peer Wellness Specialists interested in billing Trillium, please see Trillium Community Health Plan’s PSS/PWS Enrollment and Reimbursement Guide.