



Iowa Peer Workforce
Collaborative



Iowa Peer Jobs Study: Job Titles, Credentials and Wages

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Carol Coohy, Carrie Means
& Kellee Thorburn McCrory
National Resource Center
for Family-Centered
Practice, University of Iowa
<https://iowapeersupport.sites.uiowa.edu/>

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What is a Peer Worker or Provider?

Peer workers are professionals with lived experience who help others toward stability and recovery through a deep understanding of shared struggles. They develop rapport with individuals or families seeking mental health and substance misuse services or support for themselves or their children. Peer workers contribute invaluable insights to interdisciplinary teams based on their experience navigating service systems.

In this report, we'll use the term *peer support worker* to refer to someone who uses their own lived or living experience to provide services or support to other peers. *Lived or living experience* means an adult in recovery from a mental health or substance use challenge or a parent or caregiver caring for a child with a behavioral/mental health challenge. Peer support workers can be paid employees or unpaid volunteers.

What Do Peer Support Workers Do?

In a recent study, Iowa peer supervisors described core peer support worker skills (Coohey et al., 2024). Across types of peer support positions, peer workers strive to **build relationships** with peers/clients and **provide support** to help them get what they need. They use three core helper skills to support peers.

- **Problem-solve** with peers, including helping peers assess their needs and set goals
- Connect or **refer** peers to resources
- **Teach** peers how to advocate for themselves or their children

Teaching was a stronger theme for Family Peer Support Specialists (FPSS; family navigators), who often assist parents in preparing for Individualized Education Plans and other meetings.

Are Peer Workers Credentialed?

The state of Iowa does not license peer workers. Peer workers may apply to the [Iowa Board of Certification](#) (IBC) for certification after completing IBC-approved peer specialist training. Peer support workers may be certified as Peer Recovery Specialists or Family Peer Support Specialists by the IBC. Iowa does not require certification.

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services funds the University of Iowa's [Iowa Peer Workforce Collaborative](#) (IPWC) to train peer support specialists, family peer support specialists, and peer recovery coaches. They receive a certificate of completion, which is required for certification.

Why Hire Peer Workers?

Numerous studies have shown that peer services can reduce peer mental health symptoms, increase self-efficacy, reduce hospital readmission, and are cost-effective (Fortuna et al., 2022; Smit et al., 2023).

Is the Peer Workforce Growing?

Yes. The peer workforce is one of the fastest-growing groups of human services workers in the U.S. (Government Accounting Office, 2022), with more than 300,000 peers employed in Medicaid-billable mental health and substance use disorder services alone (Cronise et al., 2016). Iowa has seen a 200% increase in the number of peers employed since 2015 (see Figure 1; about 70% of known peer employers responded to the Summer 2023 survey).

Iowa has a mental health workforce shortage: 93% of its 99 counties have a severe shortage ([Rural Health Information Hub](#), 2023). Peer support workers can help fill that gap.

How Are Peer Services Funded?

Organizations fund peer services through Medicaid, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) contracts, Iowa Mental Health and Disability Services (MHDS) regions, federal and private grants, and local fundraisers. Iowa caps Medicaid reimbursement for peer services at four hours per month, with a rate of \$12.50 per 15-minute unit (\$200/peer-client).

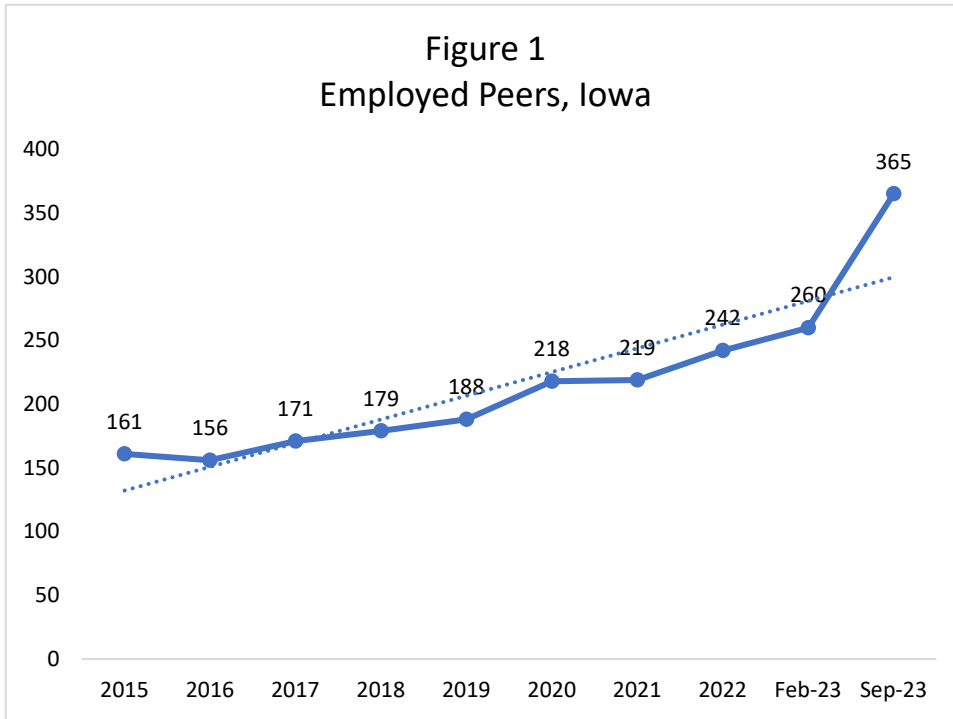
How Much Are Peer Workers Paid in Iowa?

There is no statewide data on Iowa peer worker wages/salaries. Because the Bureau of Labor Statistics does not include peer workers in its occupational classification system, estimating peer worker wages/salaries over time has been challenging. Ostrow's (2024) longitudinal study is an exception. They surveyed peer support specialists in four states and reported they earned an average of \$15.93 per hour. Other human services positions are paid substantially more (see Figure 2).

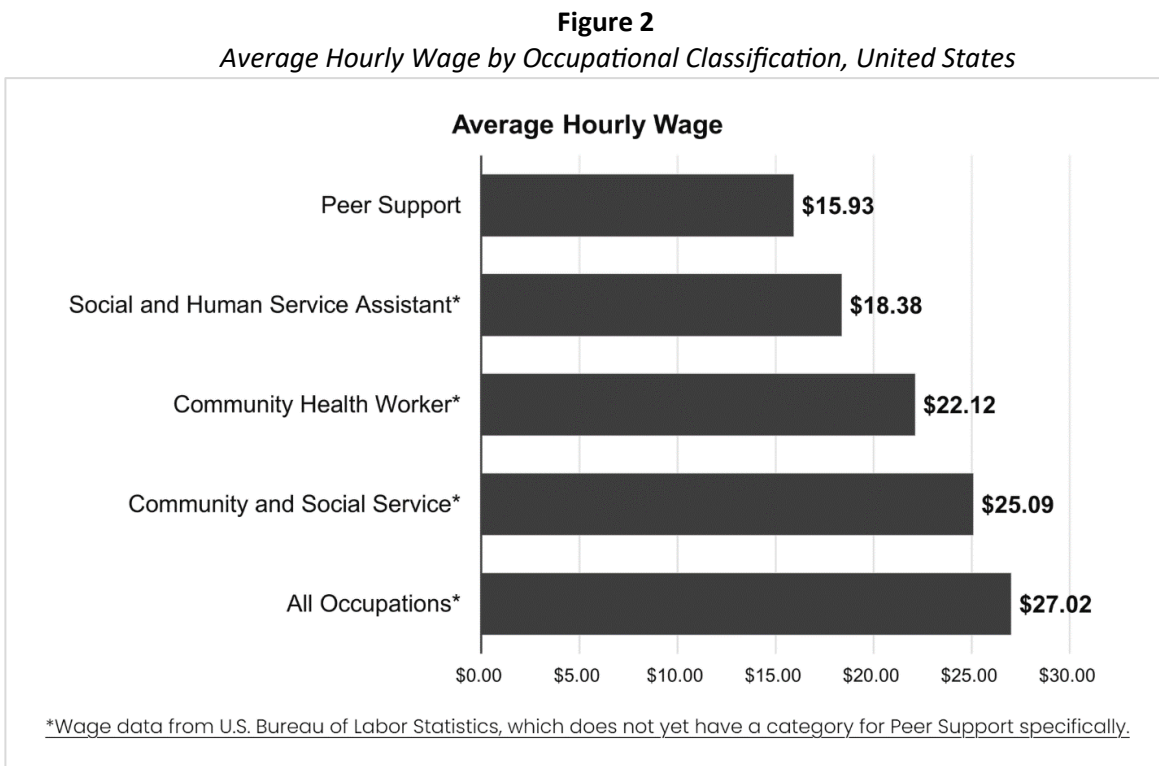
Study Purpose

Organizations in Iowa interested in creating peer services want to know how to classify peer workers by job title and how much to pay them. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe key characteristics of peer worker job ads, including job titles and earnings, in Iowa and nationally.

We were also interested in whether organizations required applicants to have a peer specialization credential, such as a certificate or certification. The number of employers who require a credential may indicate an increasing level of professionalization of peer work in Iowa.



Source: Iowa Peer Support Inventory (September 2023).



Source: Ostrow, L. (2024). [Career outcome study](#). Live & Learn, Inc. Ostrow added to Figure 2 “Peer Support” wages based on survey data from four states.

Methods

We completed a content analysis of all peer-eligible worker job ads posted on readily available job seeker websites or Iowa organizations' webpages for two months (December 7, 2023-February 6, 2024).

Ad Inclusion Criteria

We used two inclusion criteria for peer-eligible job ads:

1. Organizations employ peers to provide mental health or substance misuse services or support to adults or families.
2. Peers with lived or living experience were eligible for the position. *Lived or living experience* means an adult in recovery from a mental health or substance use challenge or a parent or caregiver caring for a child with a behavioral/mental health challenge.

When a job ad did not use the phrases "lived experience," "in recovery," or "a peer," we checked our Iowa peer-employing organization database to decide whether to include an ad. More than 96% of the ads used the word peer, in recovery, or lived experience (peer: 86%; in recovery: 51%; lived experience: 51%).

Ad Sources and Search Terms

The IPWC maintains a comprehensive list of peer-employing organizations and their job openings web pages. Todd Lange of Wellpoint initially developed this list in 2015. We checked organizations' job ads pages and searched IowaWorks.com and Indeed.com at least weekly. For this study, we also checked [ZipRecruiter.com](https://www.ziprecruiter.com) to ensure we identified all job ads.

For job seeker websites, we used several words and phrases to search for peer-eligible jobs. The most productive search terms included "Peer Support," "Peer Support Specialist," "Peer Support Worker," "Recovery," and "Family Peer."

Measures

Iowa

For Iowa job ads, we coded several variables, including employer, location (county), job title, and number of hours of employment per week. We recoded the number of hours into full-time (30 or more hours) and part-time (less than 30 hours).

Based on the job title and job description, we also coded the type of peer worker (crisis worker, family peer support worker, peer recovery worker, and peer support worker) and whether a type of IPWC peer support specialization certificate was accepted (Family Peer Support Specialist, Peer Recovery Coach, Peer Support Specialist). Positions were classified as peer recovery workers if the job duties primarily focused on supporting people with a substance use challenge (peer support worker: supporting people with a mental health challenge).

We coded three types of Iowa organizations that employ peer workers: the Integrated Provider Network (IPN), Integrated Health Home (IHH), and crisis services (CS). IDHHS's [Integrated Provider Network](#) (IPN)

is a statewide, community-based, resiliency- and recovery-oriented care system for substance use and problem gambling services (prevention, early intervention, treatment, and recovery support). [Integrated Health Homes](#) include a team of professionals, including family and peer support services, working together to provide whole-person, patient-centered, coordinated care for adults with serious mental illness and children with serious emotional disturbance. Iowa has two 988-affiliated crisis centers that respond to 988 calls, chats, and texts. In addition, Iowa has several other [programs and services](#) to support people in crisis.

Most Iowa job ads included an hourly wage rather than a yearly salary. If the ad did not include wage information, we called the organization to request it. We obtained wage data for 40 of 51 (78.4%) job ads. To report hourly wages for full-time positions, we divided the annual salary by 2,080 hours. If the ad included a range of wages, we recorded the low and high wages and calculated the middle wage.

United States

We used data from ZipRecruiter.com and Talent.com to compare Iowa wages to other states because they have algorithms to extract peer position job titles. ZipRecruiter.com and Talent.com include salary data by state for the job title “Peer Support Specialist.” We used Google Chrome’s free Instant Data Scraper Extension to download peer support specialist data by state.

There are limitations to using ZipRecruiter.com and Talent.com. First, according to Jack Kelly at [Forbes Magazine](#), under 50% of United States job postings included salary information. Consequently, job websites estimate salaries. For example, ZipRecruiter estimates the compensation range for job listings where the employer does not state a pay range using an [algorithm](#) that factors in, for example, job title and job location. Kelly (2023) reports that lower-wage and frontline workers receive more accurate information in job postings than higher-wage workers.

A second limitation of job sites is that search words and phrases will net most peer positions, but they will also inadvertently net non-peer positions. For example, Indeed.com defined [Peer Support Specialist](#) in a way that was consistent with Iowa supervisors’ descriptions of what peer support workers do; however, their search term “peer support specialist” included an ad for a family therapist because the job description said peer workers are also employed in their organization. By inadvertently including non-peer positions with higher wages, wage estimates for peer workers may be inflated. It is important to emphasize, therefore, that national data provide estimates. While the average wage may be inflated, they allow us to compare Iowa to other states.

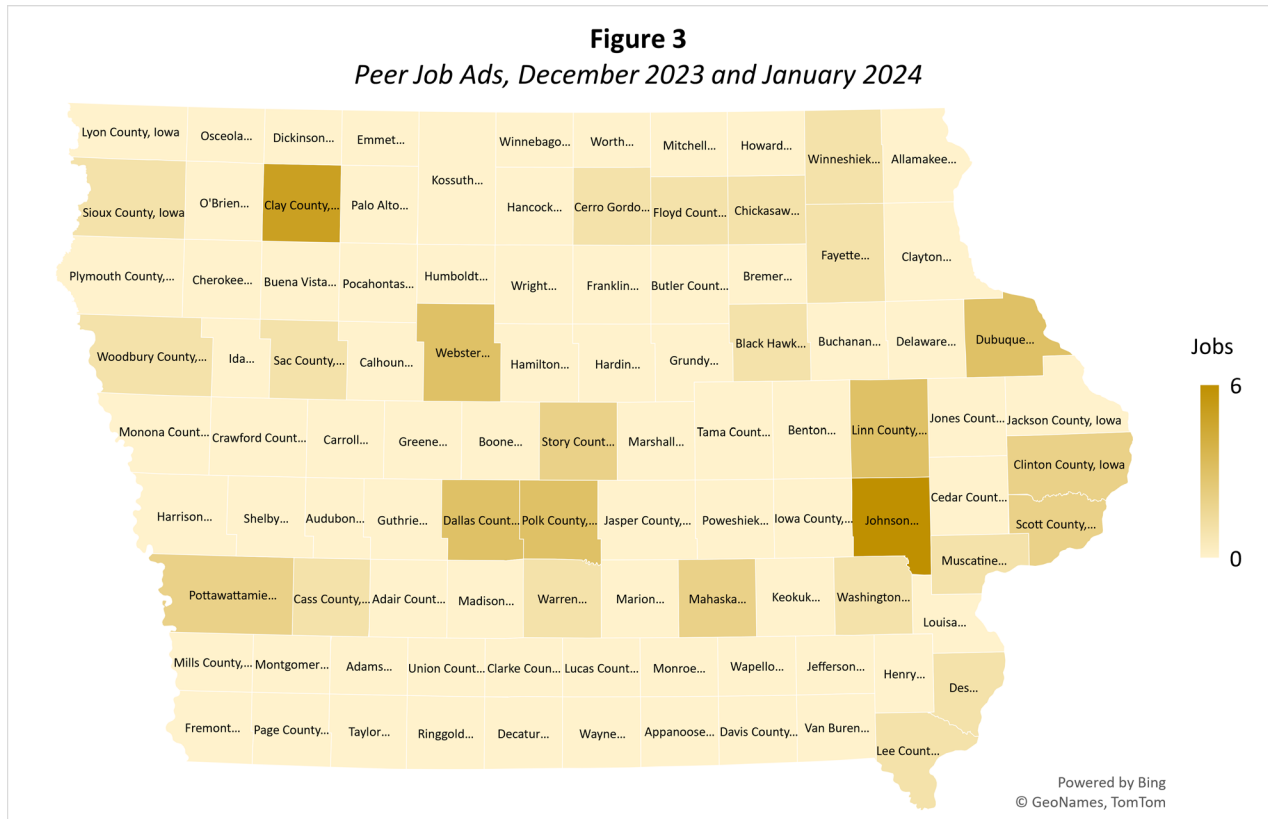
Results

Number of Job Ads

In our study, thirty-one (31) organizations posted 51 separate job ads over two months. Four organizations included more than one position in their ad, so at least 55 peer support worker positions were open.

Locations

Figure 3 shows the number of jobs by county. Johnson County had more positions because one of Iowa’s crisis centers, [CommUnity Crisis Center](#), is located there. Clay County had more positions because [Seasons Center Behavioral Health](#) had four openings.



Job Titles

Peer support workers have many job titles depending on their workplace. Talent.com and ZipRecruiter.com’s algorithm yielded job titles that frequently included the words “counselor,” “family,” “mental health,” “peer,” and “recovery.” See Table 1.

Table 2 describes Iowa’s peer job titles, which we classified into four types based on their descriptions of job duties: crisis workers, family peer support workers, peer recovery workers (work primarily with people with a substance use challenge), and peer support workers (work primarily with people with a mental health challenge).

Table 1 <i>National: Peer Worker Job Titles by Keyword</i>	
<p>Counselor Peer Support <i>Counselor</i> Peer <i>Counselor</i> Crisis <i>Counselor</i></p> <p>Family <i>Family</i> Peer Support Specialist <i>Family</i> Navigator</p> <p>Recovery Peer <i>Recovery</i> Coach Peer <i>Recovery</i> Specialist Peer <i>Recovery</i> Support Specialist <i>Recovery</i> Support Specialist Resource <i>Recovery</i> Specialist</p>	<p>Mental Health <i>Mental Health</i> Peer Specialist <i>Mental Health</i> Peer Support Specialist <i>Mental Health</i> Recovery Specialist</p> <p>Peer Certified <i>Peer</i> Specialist Forensic <i>Peer</i> Specialist Home <i>Peer</i> Support Specialist Remote <i>Peer</i> Support Specialist <i>Peer</i> Support Specialist <i>Peer</i> Advocate <i>Peer</i> Mentor <i>Peer</i> Navigator</p>
Source: Ziprecruiter.com and Talent.com	

Table 2 <i>Iowa: Peer Worker Job Titles (N=51)</i>		
	<i>n</i>	%
Crisis Workers		
Crisis Care Coordinator, Crisis Intervention Specialist, Crisis Outreach Counselor, Crisis Peer Support, Crisis Response Staff, Mobile Crisis Responder, Mobile Crisis Counselor	14	27.4
Family Peer Support Workers		
Family Peer Support, Family Support Specialist	3	7.8
Behavioral Health Coordinator	1	
Peer Recovery Workers		
Peer Recovery Coach, Peer Recovery Specialist, Recovery Support Professional, Recovery Support Specialist	12	27.4
Youth Residential Overnight Specialist	1	
Behavioral Health Coordinator	1	
Peer Support Workers		
Peer Support Specialist, Certified Peer Support Specialist	16	37.3
Mental Health Peer Support Specialist	2	
CHOICES Coordinator	1	
	51	100.0

Peer Credentials Accepted

Table 3 compares job title to the type of peer worker eligible for the position and the IPWC peer specialist certificate accepted. Although job titles suggested one type of peer worker, many employers wrote that other types of peer workers were eligible. For instance, only 7.8% of ads were for family peer support workers, but over 35% of ads said family peers could apply for their position. About 59% of the job ads said a credential was required; 41% of ads did not say whether a credential was required. Table 3 shows that 37.2% of employers accepted any peer specialization certificate (Peer Support Specialist, Family Peer Support Specialist, or Peer Recovery Coach). Most crisis worker positions accept a “Peer Support Specialist,” a “Family Support Peer Specialist,” or another mental health credential as defined in Iowa Code Section 228.1 and [Iowa Administrative Code, Chapter 24.24](#)).

Table 3		
<i>Iowa: Type of Eligible Peer Workers and Certificates Accepted (N=51)</i>		
Job Title	<i>n</i>	%
Crisis worker	14	27.4
Family peer support worker	4	7.8
Peer recovery worker	14	27.4
Peer support worker	19	37.3
Eligible		
Family peer support workers	18	35.3
Peer recovery workers	14	27.4
Peer support workers	32	62.7
Peer Certificate Accepted		
Any peer certificate	19	37.2
A Family Peer Support Specialist Certificate only	2	3.9
A Peer Support Specialist Certificate only	7	13.7
A Peer Recovery Coach Certificate only	2	3.9
Missing - The ads did not say whether a credential was required.	21	41.2
<i>Note. Column percentages for eligibility do not add up to 100% because more than one peer worker type could apply.</i>		

Types of Organizations

Table 4 shows that IPN members (27.4% of ads) and crisis services (27.4% of ads) were major peer employers. Six of the 19 IPNs had a job opening for peers.

Table 4		
<i>Iowa: Type of Peer-Employing Organizations (N=51)</i>		
	<i>n</i>	%
Crisis services	14	27.4
Integrated Provider Network (IPN)	14	27.4
Integrated Health Home (IHH)	6	11.8
None of the above	21	41.2
<i>Note. The column percentages do not add up to 100% because an IPN or IHH may offer crisis services.</i>		

Full-time and Part-time Positions

About two-thirds of positions were full-time (part-time: 37.5; $n=48$ ads included number of hours). Several jobs, 23.5%, included second shift, overnight shift, or weekends.

Wages

Iowa

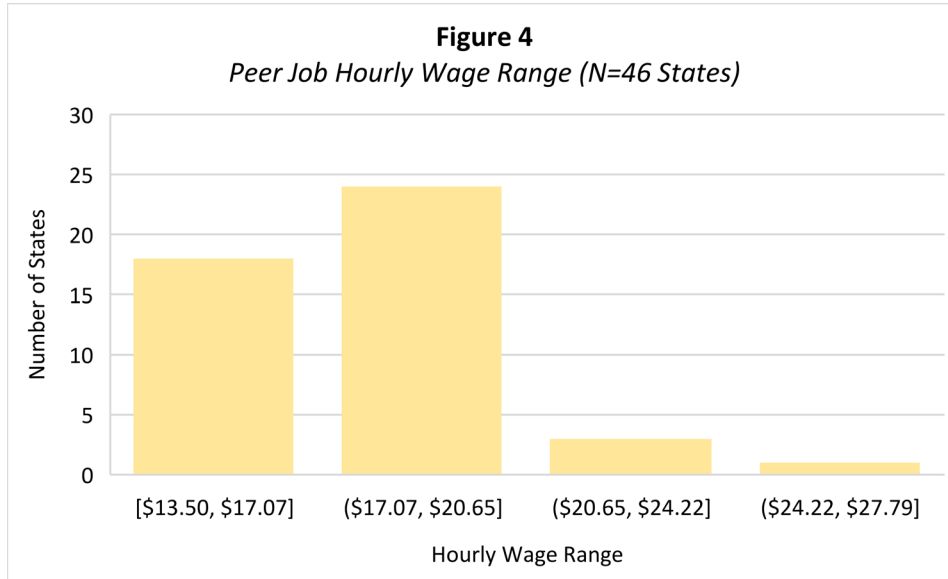
Peer job wage offers ranged from \$12.00 to \$31.84 per hour. Table 5 shows minimum (or low) hourly wage offers for Iowa peer-eligible jobs. The average low hourly wage offer was \$16.47. Crisis worker positions are open to all mental health professionals, not just peers. Organizations offer crisis workers a significantly higher wage than other types of peer positions. The average low wage offer for crisis workers was \$19.08 (peer support workers: \$15.23; family peer workers: \$16.34; peer recovery workers: \$15.01; $p<.001$). When we removed crisis worker positions from the analysis, the average low wage offer was **\$15.31**.

Table 5 also includes the median (or middle) hourly wage that organizations could offer, not the wage organizations necessarily do offer. The median hourly wage that organizations could offer was \$17.57. After removing the crisis worker positions, the median wage offer was **\$16.51**. Talent.com estimated that the average hourly wage offer for Iowa peer support workers was **\$15.47** (ZipRecruiter: **\$16.85** per hour).

Type of peer worker	n	Hourly Wage Offer			
		Low		Middle	
		Annual Salary	Hourly Wage	Annual Salary	Hourly Wage
Iowa: Our Study					
Crisis worker ^a	12	\$39,686	\$19.08	\$41,787	\$20.09
Family peer support worker ^b	4	\$33,987	\$16.34	\$41,434	\$19.92
Peer recovery worker ^c	10	\$31,220	\$15.01	\$34,091	\$16.39
Peer support worker ^c	13	\$31,678	\$15.23	\$32,906	\$15.82
All peer positions	39	\$34,257	\$16.47	\$36,546	\$17.57
Excluding crisis workers	27	\$31,845	\$15.31	\$34,341	\$16.51
Iowa: Job Sites					
Talent.com	36	n.a.	n.a.	\$32,175	\$15.47
ZipRecruiter.com	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	\$35,041	\$16.85
<i>Note.</i> n.a.=not available.					
^a Provide crisis support or services					
^b Provide support or services to parents/caregivers with a child with a behavioral/mental health challenge					
^c Provide support or services to adults with a mental health or substance use challenge					

National

Tables 6 and 7 in the Appendix include salary/wage estimates by state. ZipRecruiter ranked Iowa 42nd among 50 states on hourly wages, while Talent.com ranked Iowa 41st among 46 states. Iowa peer worker wages are in the lowest wage quartile nationally (Figure 4).



Source: Talent.com

Number of Peer Job Openings in the U.S.

Table 8 in the Appendix shows that several states with smaller populations had more job openings than Iowa.

Summary

Iowa had at least 55 job openings for peer-eligible workers over two months. Because we collected ads during the holidays, the number of openings may not represent the number in other months. While some job ads included a job title that suggested a specific type of peer worker, in actuality, several organizations accepted applications from any type of peer worker or any type of peer specialist certificate.

The minimum hourly wage offer for all Iowa peer-eligible positions was \$16.47; however, when we removed crisis worker positions from the analysis, it was **\$15.31**. The median hourly wage offer for all peer-eligible positions was \$17.57 (after removing crisis workers: **\$16.51**). A higher wage offer likely depends on other factors, such as education and years of experience. The Iowa median hourly wage offer for peer support workers in our study was consistent with Talent.com's (\$15.47) and ZipRecruiter.com's (\$16.85) estimates for peer support workers.

Iowa organizations appear to offer peer workers lower wages than in most other states.

Recommendations

For Peers

- *Use more than one job website* to identify positions, or go to [our IPWC Employment Resources page](#), which is updated weekly. Use several search terms.
- *Negotiate a higher starting wage.* If you have experience and are offered a wage below the Iowa minimum hourly peer wage, try to negotiate a higher wage.

For Peer Employers

- *Write job descriptions to ensure pay equity.* Organizations may be able to increase pay by rewriting essential job functions of peer support worker job descriptions. The scope of practice for family peer support specialists and peer support specialists is on our [Supervisor Resource page](#). There is no scope of practice for peer recovery coaches. See SAMHSA (2018) for [Core Competencies for Peer Workers in Behavioral Health Services](#).
- *Advocate for increases in salary/wages for peer workers who receive a certificate or certification.* For more information about upcoming IPWC certificate training and CEUs, click [here](#). For the Iowa Board of Certification, click [here](#).
- *Write grants.* You can sign up for [SAMHSA](#), [HRSA](#), and other funding alerts.

For Everyone!

- *Advocate for an increase in the Iowa Medicaid reimbursement rate* for peer services and to raise the cap for enrollees.
- *Participate in a 2025 Day on the Hill Event.* Join us in Des Moines on **March 3, 2025**, for a major peer-focused Day on the Hill event. We'll post updates about this event on our [Facebook](#) page.

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For More Information or Comments

Email Carol Coohy, MSW, PhD, at carol-coohy@uiowa.edu.

Research Scientist, National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice, University of Iowa
Curriculum Development and Training Specialist, Iowa Peer Workforce Collaborative, University of Iowa

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Appendix

State	Rank	Annual Salary	Hourly Wage
Alaska	1	\$47,940	\$23.05
Massachusetts	2	\$47,259	\$22.72
Washington	3	\$45,473	\$21.86
Nevada	4	\$45,327	\$21.79
Colorado	5	\$44,566	\$21.43
New York	6	\$42,022	\$20.20
Delaware	7	\$41,849	\$20.12
Illinois	8	\$41,293	\$19.85
Virginia	9	\$41,226	\$19.82
Vermont	10	\$41,053	\$19.74
Maryland	11	\$40,525	\$19.48
Nebraska	12	\$39,647	\$19.06
Missouri	13	\$39,435	\$18.96
California	14	\$39,142	\$18.82
South Carolina	15	\$39,102	\$18.80
Oregon	16	\$39,091	\$18.79
North Dakota	17	\$39,089	\$18.79
Pennsylvania	18	\$38,494	\$18.51
Oklahoma	19	\$38,396	\$18.46
Hawaii	20	\$38,367	\$18.45
New Jersey	21	\$38,363	\$18.44
North Carolina	22	\$38,295	\$18.41
Maine	23	\$38,213	\$18.37
Wisconsin	24	\$37,977	\$18.26

Idaho	25	\$37,455	\$18.01
New Hampshire	26	\$37,443	\$18.00
Kentucky	27	\$37,308	\$17.94
Texas	28	\$37,214	\$17.89
South Dakota	29	\$36,944	\$17.76
Michigan	30	\$36,890	\$17.74
Wyoming	31	\$36,834	\$17.71
Minnesota	32	\$36,665	\$17.63
New Mexico	33	\$36,476	\$17.54
Indiana	34	\$36,337	\$17.47
Rhode Island	35	\$36,208	\$17.41
Ohio	36	\$35,644	\$17.14
Arizona	37	\$35,585	\$17.11
Connecticut	38	\$35,317	\$16.98
Arkansas	39	\$35,235	\$16.94
Mississippi	40	\$35,061	\$16.86
Montana	41	\$35,049	\$16.85
Iowa	42	\$35,041	\$16.85
Alabama	43	\$34,611	\$16.64
Utah	44	\$34,047	\$16.37
Tennessee	45	\$34,030	\$16.36
Kansas	46	\$33,012	\$15.87
Georgia	47	\$32,243	\$15.50
Louisiana	48	\$32,012	\$15.39
West Virginia	49	\$29,729	\$14.29
Florida	50	\$28,535	\$13.72
Mean		\$37,861.38	\$18.20

Table 7*Talent.com: Annual Salary and Hourly Wage by State*

State	Rank	Annual Salary	Hourly Wage	Number Job Ads
Rhode Island	1	\$57,803	27.79	20
Arkansas	2	\$50,000	24.04	21
Alaska	3	\$45,885	22.06	111
Oregon	4	\$44,720	21.50	1,452
New Hampshire	5	\$42,900	20.63	47
Colorado	6	\$42,567	20.46	191
Massachusetts	7	\$42,500	20.43	122
Washington	8	\$42,338	20.35	505
New Jersey	9	\$42,179	20.28	55
Illinois	10	\$41,925	20.16	160
Nebraska	11	\$41,600	20.00	45
Virginia	12	\$41,600	20.00	231
California	13	\$40,955	19.69	1,917
New York	14	\$40,518	19.48	301
Minnesota	15	\$38,875	18.69	148
Indiana	16	\$38,792	18.65	54
Maine	17	\$38,688	18.60	110
Connecticut	18	\$38,065	18.30	74
New Mexico	19	\$37,448	18.00	26
Delaware	20	\$37,440	18.00	203
Ohio	21	\$37,440	18.00	262
Vermont	22	\$37,440	18.00	13
Florida	23	\$36,810	17.70	313
Michigan	24	\$36,525	17.56	318
Montana	25	\$36,416	17.51	66
Idaho	26	\$36,400	17.50	324
Missouri	27	\$36,400	17.50	113
Tennessee	28	\$35,629	17.13	37
Nevada	29	\$35,360	17.00	38
Utah	30	\$35,360	17.00	187
Wisconsin	31	\$35,100	16.88	70
Arizona	32	\$34,954	16.80	263
Kansas	33	\$34,752	16.71	104
Georgia	34	\$34,320	16.50	49
Maryland	35	\$33,930	16.31	213

North Carolina	36	\$33,280	16.00	733
North Dakota	37	\$33,280	16.00	29
South Carolina	38	\$33,051	15.89	78
Texas	39	\$33,020	15.88	258
Oklahoma	40	\$32,448	15.60	217
Iowa	41	\$32,175	15.47	36
West Virginia	42	\$32,175	15.47	57
Pennsylvania	43	\$31,870	15.32	232
Alabama	44	\$31,688	15.23	47
Kentucky	45	\$29,250	14.06	220
Louisiana	46	\$28,080	13.50	133
Mean		\$37,694	18.12	222

Table 8
Number of Peer Positions by 2023 State Population Estimate by Selected States

State	Pop. Size Rank	Number of Job Ads ^a	Population ^b
Oregon	27	1,452	4,233,358
Oklahoma	28	217	4,053,824
Connecticut	29	74	3,617,176
Utah	30	187	3,417,734
Iowa	31	36	3,207,004
Nevada	32	38	3,194,176
Arkansas	33	21	3,067,732
Kansas	34	104	2,940,546
Mississippi	35	n.a.	2,939,690
New Mexico	36	26	2,114,371
Nebraska	37	45	1,978,379
Idaho	38	324	1,964,726
West Virginia	39	57	1,770,071
Hawaii	40	n.a.	1,435,138
New Hampshire	41	47	1,402,054
Maine	42	110	1,395,722
Montana	43	66	1,132,812
Rhode Island	44	20	1,095,962
Delaware	45	203	1,031,890
South Dakota	46	n.a.	919,318

North Dakota	47	29	783,926
Alaska	48	111	733,406
District of Columbia	49	n.a.	678,972
Vermont	50	13	647,464
Wyoming	51	n.a.	584,057
<p><i>Note.</i> n.a.=not available. ^a Talent.com ^b U.S. Economic Development Association (March 2024). StatsAmerica. Their estimates were generated from the U.S. Census Bureau.</p>			