Peers Here, There, and Everywhere: Recovery in Integrated Heath Care

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“I want a job, a house and a social life”
“I want a job, a house and a social life”
How ‘grandmothers’ help others fight depression and anxiety
Defining Peer Roles and Status Among Community Health Workers and Peer Support Specialists in Integrated Systems of Care

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Current strategies for integrating general medical and behavioral health services focus primarily on improving the coordination of care and expanding team-based services. Recent discussions have been focused on the workforce that provide the bulk of community-based outreach, engagement, activation, motivational support, and self-management: community health workers (CHWs) and peer support specialists (PSSs). CHWs have primarily been deployed in general medical care and PSSs in behavioral health care. Understanding the unique contributions that CHWs and PSSs provide for health promotion and wellness and improved population health outcomes is an important challenge. This Open Forum reviews the key elements of peer status as a way to help illustrate the differences between these workforces and the best deployment strategies for each workforce. A framework is proposed that outlines key support roles provided by the CHW and PSS workforces.

## Peer Here and Peers There

### Appendix 1. Primary Roles and Peer Status of CHW and PSS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Roles of CHW and PSS</th>
<th>Community Health Worker (CHW)</th>
<th>Peer Status CHW and PSS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and Connection to Treatment Services</td>
<td>CHW - Primary Roles and Peer-status High &gt; Low</td>
<td>Racial and Ethnic Similarities</td>
</tr>
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<td>Prevention to Avoid Illness</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural Similarities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing Hopelessness and Trauma of Illness Conditions</td>
<td></td>
<td>Living in the Same Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activation to Support wellness and Health Improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td>Common Life Situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Self-care, Shared Decision-making, and Care Plan Adherence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Common Health Conditions</td>
</tr>
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<th>Peer Support Specialist (PSS)</th>
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In 2011, SAMHSA launched the Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale Technical Assistance Center Strategy (BRSS TACS) to promote the widespread adoption of recovery-oriented supports, services, and systems for people in recovery from substance use and/or mental health conditions.

http://www.samhsa.gov/brss-tacs
Peer Workforce and Peer Competencies

• The Affordable Care Act facilitates an expansion of patient centered medical homes as well as increased community health workforce, providing an opportunity for people to benefit from peer support.

• Through BRSS TACS, SAMHSA is helping to build that capacity by
  – Identifying and refining a set of core competencies
  – Providing technical assistance to promote strategies aimed to increase the number of peers in the workforce
Peer Workforce and Peer Core Competencies

SAMHSA assigned BRSS TACS to:

- Identify and refining a set of core competencies
- Provide technical assistance to promote strategies aimed to increase the number of peers in the workforce
Peer Practice Guidelines

- Developed through a partnership between the Addiction and Mental Health Peer disciplines
- Operationalize peer performance expectations, skills and knowledge in the workplace
Categories of the Core Competencies

- Engages peers in collaborative and caring relationships
- Provides Support
- Shares lived experiences of recovery
- Personalizes peer support
- Recovery planning
- Links to resources, services and supports
- Teaches information and skills related to health, wellness and recovery
- Helps peers to manage crises
- Communication
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Leadership and advocacy
- Growth and development
Core Competencies

• Core Competencies are intended to apply to all forms of peer support. They can:
  – Apply to other forms of peer support provided by other roles
  – Serve as the foundation upon which additional competencies for specific settings that practice peer support and/or for specific groups

• As our understanding grows, the contexts in evolve, the Core Competencies must evolve over time.
Potential Use of Core Competencies

• Guide delivery and promote best practices in peer support.
• Inform peer training programs, assist in developing standards for certification, and inform job descriptions.
• Appraise peer workers’ job performance and peers will be able to assess their own work performance.
• Set goals for continued development.
Core Competencies
Opportunities and Challenges

Opportunities
• More opportunities for input and include individuals/peers working with diverse cultures
• Clarify purpose and intent
• Clarify connection to existing mechanisms in the field
• Develop a strategic dissemination strategy

Challenges
• Need to address misconstructions of who a “peer” is and role
• More collaboration between BH systems and peer leaders
• Need sustainable funding strategies need to be identified and implemented
• Preserve the integrity of the peer services
And Peer Support Here:
Family Peer Support

• A parent provides experiential knowledge with a parent receiving support (Robbins, et al., 2009)

• Offers hope, guidance, advocacy and camaraderie for parents and caregivers

(Harry Whittier Frees photo -- Public Domain)
Family Peer Support is Recognized by Other Titles

- Parent peer support
- Family peer support
- Family support services
- Parent support professionals
- Navigators
- Mentors
- Family or parent partners
- Parent support specialists

(Hoagwood et al., 2010)
Family Peer Support Providers Offer Many Supports

• Emotional connection

• Information and educational support

• Support to develop individualized approaches and methods

(Kutash et al., 2011; Hoagwood et al., 2009)
Family Peer Support Providers Offer Many Supports

- Concrete support
- Living proof of resilience and recovery
- Others?

(Kutash et al., 2011; Hoagwood et al., 2009)
Common Services Provided by Family Peer Support Providers

(Kutash et al., 2011; Hoagwood et al., 2009; Koroloff et al., 1996)
WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT?

Peer support encompasses a range of activities and interactions between people who share similar experiences of being diagnosed with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, or both. This mutuality—often called “peerness”—between a peer support worker and person in or seeking recovery promotes connection and inspires hope.

Peer support offers a level of acceptance, understanding, and validation not found in many other professional relationships (Mead & McNeil, 2006). By sharing their own lived experience and practical guidance, peer support workers help people to develop their own goals, create strategies for self-empowerment, and take concrete steps towards building fulfilling, self-determined lives for themselves.

WHAT DOES A PEER SUPPORT WORKER DO?

A peer support worker is someone with the lived experience of recovery from a mental health condition, substance use disorder, or both. They provide support to others experiencing similar challenges. They provide non-clinical, strengths-based support and are “experientially credentialed” by their own recovery journey (Davidson, et al., 1999). Peer support workers may be referred to by different names depending upon the setting in which they practice. Common titles include: peer specialists, peer recovery coaches, peer advocates, and peer recovery support specialists.

Peer support workers can help break down barriers of experience and understanding, as well as power dynamics that may get in the way of working with other members of the treatment team. The peer support worker’s role is to assist people with finding and following their own recovery paths, without judgment, expectation, rules, or requirements.

Peer support workers practice in a range of settings, including peer-run organizations, recovery community centers, recovery residences, drug courts and other criminal justice settings, hospital emergency departments, child welfare agencies, homeless shelters, and behavioral health and primary care settings. In addition to providing the many types of assistance encompassed in the peer support role, they conduct a variety of outreach and engagement activities.

“Because of peer support I am alive!”
—Melodie

“When I saw that other people recovered, it gave me hope that I could too.”
—Corinna

“peer support allowed me to feel ‘normal.’”
—Jean

Peer support has been there for me no matter what, and now I am able to help others...
—Liza
HOW DOES PEER SUPPORT HELP?

The role of a peer support worker complements, but does not duplicate or replace the roles of therapists, case managers, and other members of a treatment team. Consider someone who received a prosthetic arm after an accident. Clinical staff would explain how the new arm works, how to take it off and put it on, and how to care for it. A peer supporter who shares the experience of losing a limb, however, would be able to empathize with the person about what it is like to receive a prosthetic arm, the experience of introducing it to one’s family, and how it feels to go out in public with it.

Peer support workers bring their own personal knowledge of what it is like to live and thrive with mental health conditions and substance use disorders. They support people’s progress towards recovery and self-determined lives by sharing vital experiential information and real examples of the power of recovery. The sense of mutuality created through thoughtful sharing of experience is influential in modeling recovery and offering hope (Davidson, Bellamy, Guy, & Miller, 2012).

Does Peer Support Make a Difference?

Emerging research shows that peer support is effective for supporting recovery from behavioral health conditions. Benefits of peer support may include:

- Increased self-esteem and confidence (Davidson, et al., 1999; Salzer, 2002);
- Increased sense of control and ability to bring about changes in their lives (Davidson, et al., 2012);
- Increased sense that treatment is responsive and inclusive of needs (Davidson, et al., 2012);
- Increased sense of hope and inspiration (Davidson, et al., 2006; Ratzlaff, McDiarmid, Marty, & Rapp, 2006);
- Increased empathy and acceptance (camaraderie) (Caotsworth-Puspokey, Forchuk, & Ward-Griffin, 2006; Davidson, et al., 1999);
- Increased engagement in self-care and wellness (Davidson, et al., 2012);
- Reduced hospital admission rates and longer community tenure (Chinman, Weingarten, Stayner, & Davidson, 2001; Davidson, et al., 2012; Forchuk, Martin, Chan, & Jenson, 2003; Min, Whitecraft, Rothbard, Salzer, 2007);
- Increased social support and social functioning (Kurtz, 1990; Nelson, Ochoka, Janzen, & Trainor, 2006; Ochoka et al., 2006; Trainor, Shepherd, Boydell, Jeff, & Crawford, 1997; Yanos, Primavera, & Knight, 2001);
- Decreased psychotic symptoms (Davidson, et al., 2012); and
- Decreased substance use and depression (Davidson, et al., 2012).

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THE VALUE OF PEERS FOR SUPPORTING RECOVERY FROM MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT?

Peer support encompasses a range of activities and interactions between people who have shared similar experiences of being diagnosed with mental health conditions. This mutuality—often called “peerness”—between a peer worker and person using services promotes connection and inspires hope.

Peer support offers a level of acceptance, understanding, and validation not found in many other professional relationships (Mead and McNeil, 2006). “I am an expert at not being an expert, and that takes a lot of expertise,” said one (anonymous) peer worker, highlighting the supportive rather than directive nature of the peer relationship (Promise Resource Network, 2016). By sharing their own lived experience and practical guidance, peer workers help people to develop their own goals, create strategies for self-empowerment, and take concrete steps towards building fulfilling, self-determined lives for themselves.

WHAT DO PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS DO?

SUPPORT THE RECOVERY OF INDIVIDUALS

Peer workers offer encouragement, practical assistance, guidance, and understanding to support recovery. Peer support workers walk alongside people in recovery, offering individualized supports and demonstrating that recovery is possible. They share their own lived experience of moving from hopelessness to hope. They share tools that can complement or replace clinical supports by providing strategies for self-empowerment and achieving a self-determined life. They support people in recovery to connect with their own inner strength, motivation, and desire to move forward in life, even when experiencing challenges. Peer workers offer different types of support, including:

- emotional (empathy and camaraderie)
- informational (connections to information and referrals to community resources that support health and wellness)
- instrumental (concrete supports such as housing or employment)
- affiliational support (connections to community supports, activities, and events)

IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS

Peer support is valuable not only for the person receiving services, but also for behavioral health professionals and the systems in which they work. Peer workers educate their colleagues and advance the field by sharing their perspectives and experience in order to increase understanding of how practices and policies may be improved to promote wellness and resiliency. This is particularly important in mental health systems, where historical oppression, violence, and discrimination present significant barriers to recovery for many people. Peer workers play vital roles in moving behavioral health professionals and systems towards recovery orientation.

“Peer support has been excellent. Helping us along the way, being there whenever you need people to talk to. I don’t know where to begin. They’re always there ... no matter what it is.”

—Mika

Because of peer support, I can stand on my own today.

—John

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IS PEER RECOVERY SUPPORT EFFECTIVE FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS?

The research on peer support in mental health systems is still emerging, but findings are promising. The research to date suggests that peer recovery support may result in:

- **Increased social functioning** (Walker & Bryant, 2013)
- **Decreased hospitalization** (Davidson, et al., 2012)
- **Decreased self-stigma** (Corrigan, et al., 2013)
- **Increased community engagement** (Min, et al., 2007)
- **Increased engagement and activation in treatment** (Druss, et al., 2010; Short, et al., 2012; Bellamy, et al., 2012)
- **Increased quality of life and life satisfaction** (Bologna and Pulice, 2010; Felton, et al., 1995)
- **Decreased costs to the mental health system** (Trachtenberg, et al., 2013)

**REFERENCES**


WHAT ARE PEER RECOVERY SUPPORT SERVICES?

Peer recovery support services, delivered by peer recovery coaches, are one form of peer support. They involve the process of giving and receiving non-clinical assistance to support long-term recovery from substance use disorders. A peer recovery coach brings the lived experience of recovery, combined with training and supervision, to assist others in initiating and maintaining recovery, helping to enhance the quality of personal and family life in long-term recovery (White, 2009). Peer recovery support services can support or be an alternative to clinical treatment for substance use disorders.

Peer-based recovery supports are part of an emerging transformation of systems and services addressing substance use disorders. They are essential ingredients in developing a recovery-oriented system in which clinical treatment plays an important, but singular, role. Acute care substance use treatment without other recovery supports has often not been sufficient in helping individuals to maintain long-term recovery. Substance use disorders are currently understood to be chronic conditions that require long-term management, like diabetes. Peer-based recovery support provides a range of person-centered and strength-based supports for long-term recovery management. These supports help people in recovery build recovery capital—the internal and external resources necessary to begin and maintain recovery (Best & Laudet, 2010; Cloud & Granfield, 2008).

WHAT DO PEER RECOVERY COACHES DO?

Peer recovery coaches walk side by side with individuals seeking recovery from substance use disorders. They help people to create their own recovery plans, and develop their own recovery pathways. Recovery coaches provide many different types of support, including:

- **emotional** (empathy and concern)
- **informational** (connections to information and referrals to community resources that support health and wellness)
- **instrumental** (concrete supports such as housing or employment)
- **affiliational support** (connections to recovery community supports, activities, and events)

Recovery plans and other supports are customized, and build on each individual’s strengths, needs, and recovery goals.

Peer recovery support focuses on long-term recovery and is rooted in a culture of hope, health, and wellness. The focus of long-term peer recovery support goes beyond the reduction or elimination of symptoms to encompass self-actualization, community, and civic engagement, and overall wellness.

The unique relationship between the peer recovery coach and the individual in or seeking recovery is grounded in trust, and focused on providing the individual with tools, resources, and support to achieve long-term recovery.

Peer recovery coaches work in a range of settings, including recovery community centers, recovery residences, drug courts and other criminal justice settings, hospital emergency departments, child welfare agencies, homeless shelters, and behavioral health and primary care settings. In addition to providing the range of support encompassed in the peer recovery coach role, they take an active role in outreach and engagement within these settings.

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1. Peer recovery support services, peer-delivered recovery support, and peer-based recovery support are used interchangeably.

"Peer support helped me see that I was not hopeless. It gave me my voice back and bolstered my self-worth."
—Michelle

“When I needed someone to walk beside me, peer support was there.”
—Steve
IS PEER RECOVERY COACHING EFFECTIVE?

People who have worked with peer recovery coaches provide strong testimonies of the positive impacts of peer recovery support on their own recovery journeys. The research supports these experiences. While the body of research is still growing, there is mounting evidence that people receiving peer recovery coaching show reductions in substance use, improvements on a range of recovery outcomes, or both. Two rigorous systematic reviews examined the body of published research on the effectiveness of peer-delivered recovery supports published between 1995 and 2014. Both concluded that there is a positive impact on participants (Bassuk, Hanson, Greene, Richard, & Laudet, 2016; Reif et al., 2014).

More rigorous studies are needed to better understand the key elements of successful peer recovery support, especially as the field moves toward adopting evidence-based practices. Taken as a whole, the current body of research suggests that people receiving peer recovery support may experience:

- Improved relationship with treatment providers
- Reduced emergency service utilization
- Decreased criminal justice involvement
- Reduced relapse rates
- Reduced re-hospitalization rates
- Increased treatment retention
- Reduced substance use
- Increased satisfaction with the overall treatment experience
- Improved access to social supports
- Greater housing stability

REFERENCES


WHAT IS PARENT PEER SUPPORT?

Parent peer support, also commonly called family peer support or family support services, offers hope, guidance, advocacy, and camaraderie for parents and caregivers of children and youth receiving services from mental health, substance use, and related service systems. Parent support providers deliver peer support through face-to-face support groups, phone calls, or individual meetings. They bring expertise based on their own experience parenting children or youth with social, emotional, behavioral, or substance use challenges, as well as specialized training, to support other parents and caregivers. Working within a peer support framework that recognizes the power of mutuality and experiential understanding, parent support providers deliver education, information, and peer support (Orochta et al., 2011).

Parents trying to identify and access appropriate services for their child may find child-serving systems (e.g., mental health, education, juvenile justice, child welfare, substance use treatment) complicated and overwhelming. Parent peer support can help these parents navigate systems more effectively, learn from the experiences of other families, feel less alone, and gain hope, ideas, and information. This support can help parents meet their children’s needs more efficiently, and with greater confidence and hope. (Kutash et al., 2011, Hoagwood et al., 2009).

WHAT DO PARENT SUPPORT PROVIDERS DO?

Parent support providers offer a wide range of assistance and support, depending on the settings in which they work and the needs of the families they serve.

**PARENT SUPPORT PROVIDERS OFFER:**
- emotional connection of people who have “been there”;
- informational and educational support on systems and strategies;
- support for parents as they develop positive approaches and methods for addressing their family’s day-to-day needs, including their own needs for self-care;
- concrete support, such as help arranging child care or transportation; and
- living proof of resilience and recovery.

Parent support providers are also known as navigators, coaches, mentors, parent support professionals, parent partners or peers. Parent support providers offer a wide range of assistance and support, depending on the settings in which they work and the needs of the families they serve.

**COMMON SERVICES INCLUDE:**
- information and referral;
- individualized supports to help parents understand their children’s needs and access natural supports;
- support groups;
- parent training and education to increase knowledge and skills;
- system navigation to assist a family in finding or accessing resources;
- intensive family support during periods of crisis;
- specialized supports for families experiencing challenges with systems such as child welfare, juvenile courts, or schools; and
- social activities and events to bring families together, raise awareness, or offer educational opportunities.

“My family was involved in a variety of services in our community. Once we began to work with a parent support professional, we felt that we had a person in our corner who worked just for us. It made a huge difference.”
— David
“I don’t know what I would have done without our parent support provider. She understood what I was going through, and she didn’t judge me. She was available whenever I needed her, not just during business hours. She helped my family get back on our feet.”

—Stacey

References


If you want to go fast, go alone.
If you want to go far, go together.
Connect with SAMHSA

Main website:  https://www.samhsa.gov/

Email Updates:  
https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USSAMHSA/subscriber/new

Blog:  https://blog.samhsa.gov/

Social Media:
Thank you!

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