

# Peer Support Services are Integral to Mental Health Recovery

## 1. What are peer support services?

Peer support services are provided on an individual or group basis. Peer providers have personal experience living with a mental health challenge in their journey towards mental health recovery. Services include emotional support and coping strategies. This helps clients to manage their lives effectively and enhance their personal growth. Peer services also include many types of self-help groups, including 12 Step groups, the Depressive and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) and Recovery International. Peer specialists are professionals who are uniquely qualified to provide this kind of assistance. They are employed by private and public mental health and healthcare agencies. In general, peer support specialists are compensated for their services. But some may volunteer their time. Research shows that peer support programs can lead to better outcomes for people with mental health challenges.<sup>i</sup>

## 2. How are outcomes better with peer support?

Peer support promotes the mental health recovery model that concentrates on wellness, recovery and client driven approaches. The recovery model focuses on living *with* mental health or substance abuse disorders rather than being overcome by them. It emphasizes self-care and independence rather than dependence on others. People can and do recover. Pathways to recovery are highly personalized. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recognizes that “each individual determines his or her own way.”<sup>iii</sup> In doing so, individuals “are empowered and provided the resources

to make informed decisions, initiate recovery, build on their strengths, and gain or regain control over their lives.”<sup>iii</sup> Each client or consumer may have his or her own definition of recovery.

### 3. Why is the recovery approach more effective than the traditional “medical model?”<sup>iv</sup>

Studies indicate that peer support combined with traditional and non-traditional mental health services<sup>v</sup> is more effective than either type of service alone. People with mental health challenges may be more comfortable with services provided by peers. By way of shared experiences, peers can better relate and understand one another. People who are involved in consumer-run services tend to be more socially active. They also develop more problem-centered coping strategies and skills. Studies have found that participation in self-help services may lower hospitalization rates.<sup>vi</sup> Peer support enhances the quality of the mental health team and services.

### 4. Where are peer support services available in California?

Both public and private mental health agencies provide peer support services. California promotes the employment of mental health people with mental health challenges and family members at the local level. For example, such programs as Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) or Full Service Partnership (FSP) include peer specialists.

### 5. What if peer support services are not available for all consumers in my area?

People can work together to expand access to peer support services in their communities. For example, individuals and agencies can get involved with their county mental health board or commission to address unmet needs. For more information, contact:

1. Peer/Self-Advocacy Program (PSA) of Disability Rights California at: [www.disabilityrightsca.org/about/psa.htm](http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/about/psa.htm)
2. California Association of Mental Health Peer Run Organizations (CAMHPRO) at: [szinman@aol.com](mailto:szinman@aol.com)
3. The National Association of Peer Specialists at: <http://na4ps.wordpress.com>
4. The National Empowerment Center at: <http://www.power2u.org/>

5. The National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse at: <http://mhselfhelp.org/>
6. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Peer to Peer at: <http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=peer-to-peer>
7. Dual Recovery Anonymous at: <http://www.draonline.org/>

## 6. Is there a need for culturally competent peer support services?

Yes, absolutely. Culturally competent services include an understanding of the diverse belief systems concerning mental illness, health, healing and wellness. Such belief systems vary among racial, ethnic, geographic, linguistic and other cultural groups. "Client culture," is one such belief system. It relates to the unique experiences and values of consumers. Peers understand and appreciate what it is like to be a recipient of mental health services. They have personal experience with the local culture. They can help navigate the mental health system. Their knowledge is helpful in facilitating mental health clients' journeys toward wellness and recovery.

## 7. Can peer support be found in places outside the mental health system?

Yes. Peer support is provided in a variety of locations. For example, support groups can be organized in such settings as churches, community centers, schools, or health centers.

We want to hear from you! After reading this fact sheet please take this short survey and give us your feedback.

English version: <http://fs12.formsite.com/disabilityrightsca/form54/index.html>

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*The Stigma, Discrimination, Reduction and Advancing Policy to Eliminate Discrimination Program (APEDP), is funded by the voter approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63) and administered by the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA). County MHSAs fund support CalMHSA, which is an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. CalMHSA operates services and education programs on a statewide, regional and local basis. For more information, visit <http://www.calmhsa.org>.*

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<sup>i</sup> See SAMHSA, *Consumer-Operated Services: The Evidence*. HHS Pub. No. SMA-11-4633, Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011, available at: <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA11-4633CD-DVD/TheEvidence-COSP.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> See SAMHSA's "Working Definition of Recovery from Mental Disorders and/or Substance Abuse Disorders," updated March 23, 2012, available at: <http://blog.samhsa.gov/2012/03/23/definition-of-recovery-updated/>

<sup>iii</sup> See SAMHSA, Working Definition of Recovery.

<sup>iv</sup> While the traditional Medical Model is "illness centered," the current Recovery Model is "person centered." For more information, see Mark Ragins, MD, "The Recovery Model Handouts and Reference Materials," available at: <http://www.ibhp.org/uploads/file/Recovery%20model%20paper-Ragins.pdf>

<sup>v</sup> Traditional service providers provide assistance at hospitals or in clinics, and include psychiatrists and psychologists. Non-traditional service providers provide home-based services or assistance at other community-based sites, and include peer counselors, Wellness Centers, and Crisis Residential programs.

<sup>vi</sup> See SAMHSA, "The Evidence" at p.38.

