

# INVOLVING PEERS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE & PROBLEM-SOLVING COLLABORATIVES

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## Goals of this document:

- Define the titles and roles of peers in criminal justice and behavioral health collaboratives;
- Stress the value and importance of involving consumers with relevant lived experience in collaboratives;
- Provide guidance on how to involve consumers in collaboratives; and
- Outline state-specific peer specialist trainings, certifications, and Medicaid reimbursement policies.

Forensic peer support connects individuals with shared experiences, foremost with justice involvement, and often with mental illness, substance use problems, socio-economic, and/or further challenges that affect their ability to successfully reintegrate in their communities (Davidson & Rowe, 2008; Rowe et al., 2007). Support is provided to peers with the goal of overcoming challenges associated with criminal justice involvement and mental illness, and in promotion of desired social and personal change. Peer Support can be provided in many forms, such as linkage to community services (e.g., self-help groups, vocational services, and mental health/substance use services), mentoring and advice, social support, or simple encouragement (Davidson & Rowe, 2008; Rowe et al., 2007).

## Involvement of Consumers or Peer Advocates on Advisory Boards

### Pre-Publication Edition

Many agencies and organizations recognize the value of a consumer perspective in their planning and decision-making processes. It is important, however, that the information and suggestions given by consumers are seriously considered and implemented when possible. The Council of State Governments (2002) reports on the frustration voiced by some consumers in advisory roles, such as feeling as though their “inclusion reflects tokenism rather than an openness to their experience or perceptions of the system” (CSG, 2002). It is critical that agencies and organizations support the engagement of an active role by consumer board members, and not simply hire them for the satisfaction of requirements.

## What is a “Forensic Peer Specialist”?

The Forensic Peer Specialist encompasses a variety of roles and specific duties, and job requirements, training, and qualifications vary across settings (Harrington, 2011; Miller & Fuller, 2007). In 2001, Howie the Harp Peer Advocacy Center coined the term “Forensic Peer Specialist.” This training program laid the framework for many of forensic peer specialist training programs that exist today. The program’s core curriculum emphasizes: “Self-help and Recovery; Human Services Roles and Responsibilities; Work Readiness; Navigating the Criminal Justice System; and, Professional Ethics” (Miller & Fuller, 2007). Many forensic peer support programs engage trained forensic peer specialists who are qualified to address the individual needs of consumers seeking support, emanating from their own experiences with the justice system and barriers against recovery, and also from targeted training for providing support to this population.

One of the particular strengths of increasing the overall involvement of peers with histories in the behavioral health and criminal justice systems is that they have a better understanding of the culture of incarceration and the significant challenges that any involvement in the system has on such factors as eligibility for entitlements, housing, and employment. Forensic Peer Specialists have an enhanced ability to empathize while promoting recovery based personal reform because they have faced similar challenges and experiences (Davidson & Rowe, 2008).

## Other Types of Peer Recovery & Support Services

There is a broad array of terms or titles for consumers who provide peer recovery and support services across the mental health and recovery services field. These terms are often used interchangeably, leading to some ambiguity and confusion about their specific meanings.

**Peer Mentoring and Peer Counseling** are mentoring and support services delivered to peers from peers, promoting wellness and recovery from the support of the provider's lived experience. Peer staff can help to improve independence and self-sufficiency by providing linkage to available resources and services; showing empathy and sharing stories of past challenges and recovery; and assisting in development of crisis-plans, interventions, and strategies. Peer mentor and peer counselors are not usually required to have specific licensing or certification.

A **Peer Wellness Coach** employs a holistic approach in assisting peers to engage in healthy decision-making and behaviors to enhance their overall wellness and quality of life. A Peer Wellness Coach can work with peer clients on reducing high risk behaviors such as smoking, poor nutrition, and lack of exercise. Empowerment is used as a strategy to support wellness goals and positive lifestyle change. A peer wellness coach does not apply counseling strategies or interventions.

**Peer Support Groups** are the joining together of peers with similar struggles and needs with the goal of mutual support. Group participants share personal experiences, challenges, and successes among the group to provide and receive support. A key principle of group support is that sharing experiences and strategies can help group participants to "cope with their condition" (USDHHS, 1999).

**Peer Advocates** raise awareness through education and training. They also give input for policy development, intervention strategies, and program

development; provide information on linkages to support, treatments, and services; serve as a mediator; and promote the protection of rights (WHO, 2003).

A key peer advocacy role is raising awareness and educating the stakeholders such as service professionals, decision makers, and government officials about mental health matters. This includes informing stakeholders about issues and disparities that affect individuals with mental illness, substance use disorders, and co-occurring disorders. Having personal experience and direct insight into challenges that might be encountered by the population they are representing, peer advocates provide an invaluable voice to represent consumers. The power of awareness can have a significant

Peer recovery and support services greatly enhance the behavioral health and criminal justice systems, and include opportunities for peers to mentor, coach, counsel, advocate, and lead support groups.

impact on policy and implementation of procedures. Peer advocates can also contribute to training curricula for service providers or other

professionals (McCormick, Crews, & Deaz, 2004 & WHO, 2003).

On the individual support level, peer advocates provide consumers with knowledge, skills, and resources to overcome barriers and sustain a healthy quality of life. Peer advocates can enhance skills and share strategies from personal experience as well as provide linkages with community services. They can also educate consumers on their rights and directly mediate and advocate for clients (WHO, 2003).

The **Forensic Peer Advocate** involves an additional component of legal and criminal justice representation. Forensic Peer Advocates can disseminate knowledge and insight to legal policy and procedures, offender programs, court decisions, and other areas that affect justice-involved individuals with mental illness, substance use disorder, and co-occurring disorders. In addition, a forensic peer advocate can mediate and represent individual offenders with linkage to services, case management, court hearings, and other legal matters.

## **Importance of Training**

Training for a peer specialist or peer advocate position is important to ensure that job-tasks and duties are performed effectively and appropriately. An established training program is extremely valuable for ensuring the duties of the role are understood. Matching the training to the responsibilities and qualifications is crucial for all peer specialists.

Individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system and have mental illness, substance use, trauma, and co-occurring disorders can be vulnerable, and are often in a critical recovery and reintegration stage. Training is necessary to ensure consumers are counseled and responded to appropriately. Further, many training programs assist peer-providers in facing past challenges and ensuring recovery is sustained.

One example of forensic peer training is the renowned “Howie the Harp Forensic Peer Specialist Training” program. Their primary goal is to prepare peer specialists with legal and criminal justice history to provide services and support to currently recovering peers in reentry or community corrections.

The first step in the training program is to help trainees to accept and come to terms with their own mental health recovery and criminal justice and trauma histories. This is integral in their ability to provide support to other peers.

Next, the program teaches peer specialists necessary human services skills, work-readiness, and employment retention skills. These and additional skills taught by the program are transferable life skills.

Finally, peer specialists learn how to resolve any unresolved criminal justice or personal issues that might affect finding or sustaining employment (Miller & Fuller, 2007)

## **Statewide Certification and Medicaid Reimbursable Programs**

Under the Social Security Act, Sections 1905 (a) 13 and 1915 (b) 3, peer services are considered a Medicaid reimbursable service in some states. In such cases, the peer specialist is required to undergo specific state delivered (or approved) training and credentialing programs, and must adhere to specific state provisions of supervision and coordination of care to qualify for reimbursement (Eiken & Campbell, 2008).

Most certification programs do not focus specifically on justice-involved. Strategies to integrate peer support with the criminal justice community include developing partnerships with state or local criminal justice stakeholders and cross-training of peer service providers on the criminal justice system. It is highly valuable to work with stakeholders to implement forensic peer service programs or trainings that consider the risks and needs of justice-involved individuals with mental illness, substance use, and co-occurring disorders.

## **How to Access Training or Peer Support Services**

There may be available trainings or peer support services for referral in your area. Check with your state and local department of mental health, state-wide not-for-profit agencies, local mental health services, not-for-profit centers, and advocacy centers.

The National Association of State Mental Health Directors (NASMHPD) promotes peer-to-peer services. To learn more, visit [www.nasmhpd.org](http://www.nasmhpd.org).

The National Association of Peer Specialists provides peer services, training, and other resources. To learn more, visit [www.naops.org](http://www.naops.org).

“Pillars of Peer Support” provides background and recommendations on various aspects of peer support, including the expansion of Medicaid to allow states to consider peer services as Medicaid reimbursable. To learn more, visit [www.pillarsofpeersupport.org](http://www.pillarsofpeersupport.org).

The following list of states, certifications, trainings, and Medicaid criteria is from the OptumHealth State Handbook for Peer and Family Support Services (2010):

State	Medicaid Reimbursable	State Certification	Certifying Agency	Title	Website
California	N/S	N/S	N/S	N/S	N/A
Colorado	N/S	N/S	N/S	N/S	N/A
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Georgia Certified Peer Specialist Project	Certified Peer Specialist	www.gacps.org
Illinois	N/S	Yes	DHS Division of Mental Health & Illinois Certification Board	Certified Recovery Support Specialist	www.iaodapca.org
New York	No	No	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ohio	No	No; In Process	N/A	N/A	www.mentalhealth.ohio.gov
Tennessee	N/S	Yes	Tennessee Certified Peer Specialist Program	Certified Peer Specialist	www.tennessee.gov
Texas	No	Yes	viaHOPE Texas Mental Health Resource	Certified Peer Specialist; Recovery Focused Learning Community	www.viahope.org
Wisconsin	Yes	In Process	Wisconsin Department of Health Services	N/S	www.dhs.wisconsin.gov

N/A: Not Available; N/S: Not Specified

While some certifications are state-sponsored, others are made available by local and community-based organizations. The following list of is from the OptumHealth State Handbook for Peer and Family Support Services (2010):

State	Certifying Agency	Program Name	Website
California	Recovery Innovations	Recovery Innovations, Peer Training and Employment	www.recoveryinnovations.org
California	Richmond Area Multi-Services (RAMS) and San Francisco State University (SFSU)	Peer Specialist Mental Health Certificate Program	www.ramsinc.org
Colorado	Community Connections	The Peer Specialist Program, Peer Specialist Training the Trainer	www.peertraining.com
Colorado	Colorado West Regional Mental Health, Inc.	Colorado West Regional Mental Health Inc., Peer Specialist Training	www.cwrmmc.org
Illinois	Illinois Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Professional Certification Association	Certified Criminal Justice Addictions Professional Program	www.iaodapca.org
Illinois	Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance	Peer Specialist Training Program	www.dbsalliance.org
New York	Mental Health Empowerment Project	Peer Specialist Training Program	www.mhepinc.org
New York	NYS Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services	Peer Bridger Program; Peer Health Care Coaching	www.nyaprs.org
New York	Community Access	Howie the Harp Peer Advocacy and Training Center	www.communityaccess.org
Wisconsin	WI Department of Health, Services/Pathways to Independence, and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Wisconsin Certified Peer Specialist Program	www.dhs.wisconsin.gov

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