The Case for Peer Support

Peer support is an evidence-based practice for individuals with mental health conditions or challenges. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence indicate that peer support lowers the overall cost of mental health services by reducing re-hospitalization rates and days spent in inpatient services, increasing the use of outpatient services. Peer support improves quality of life, increases and improves engagement with services, and increases whole health and self-management. This document identifies key outcomes of peer support services over a range of studies differentiated by program, geographic location, and year. Though many of the studies and programs listed below have some major programmatic differences, one thing is the same – they all demonstrate the value of peer support.

The Evidence

Reduced re-hospitalization rates
- Recovery Innovations in Arizona saw a 56% reduction in hospital readmission rates
- Pierce County Washington reduced involuntary hospitalization by 32% leading to a savings of 1.99 million dollars in one year
- Optum Pierce Peer Bridger programs served 125 people and had 79.2% reduction in hospital admission year over year resulting in $550,215 in savings; 100% of consumers had been hospitalized prior to having peer coach, only 3.4% were hospitalized after getting a coach

Reduced days inpatient
- Participants assigned a peer mentor had significantly fewer re-hospitalizations & fewer hospital days
- TN PeerLink program: significant decrease of 90% in average number of acute inpatient days per month
- WI PeerLink Program showed 71% decrease in number of acute inpatient days per month
- In two of their managed care contracts, Optum saw an 80.5% average reduction of inpatient days for individuals who had at least two hospitalizations on average per year

Lowered overall cost of services
- A Federally Qualified Health Center in Denver (FQHC) that used peer support had an ROI of $2.28 for every $1 spent. In a different program, Recovery Mentors provided individualized support for schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder: over 9 months, saw .89 vs. 1.53 hospitalizations, 10.08 vs. 19.08 days in hospital
• An effort to reduce depression/anxiety disorders in India demonstrated a 30% decrease in prevalence, 36% decrease in suicide attempts, 4.43 fewer days no work/reduced work in previous 30 days; cost-effective & cost-saving

• A 2013 review of determined that the financial benefits of peer support exceed the costs, in some cases substantially.

• In a 2013 study, 28.7% of respondents were not employed or had transitional/sheltered employment before CPS training. As a result of their work as CPS, 60% of respondents transitioned off or reduced public assistance and reduced their use of mental health care services. Changes in the respondents’ mental health service use are outlined below:

![Changes in Mental Health Service Use](image)

- **Increased use of outpatient services**
  - The following are data indicating the effectiveness of the Peer Bridger model created by the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase in number of people who use inpatient services</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York*</td>
<td>47.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>38.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in number of inpatient days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York*</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in number of outpatient visits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York*</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease in total Behavioral Health Costs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York*</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The New York-based outcomes were achieved via the application of the Peer Bridger model.
90% of PEOPLE Inc’s Rose House crisis respite program (Orange County, NY) participants did not return to hospital in the following two years, 2010 program evaluation data.

Mental Health Peer Connection’s Life Coaches helped 53% of individuals with employment goals to successfully return to work in the Buffalo, NY area, 2010 program evaluation data.

Western NY’s Housing Options Made Easy helped 70% of residents to successfully stay out of hospital in the following year, 2011 program evaluation data.

A Mental Health America and Kaiser Permanente Pilot Study showed an increase in supports for individuals as they transitioned from inpatient settings and increased connection with behavioral health team.

Increased quality of life outcomes

- Instillation of hope through positive self-disclosure, role modeling self-care of one’s illness, empathy & conditional regard may lead to higher demands/expectations for clients.
- A meta-analysis showed peer support is superior to usual care in reducing depressive symptoms.
- Individuals receiving peer support are more likely to have employment.
- Peer support improves symptoms of depression more than care as usual.
- A Mental Health America and Kaiser Permanente Pilot Study showed an increased ability to meet participants’ social needs with interventions in the community and improved ability to address gaps following inpatient services like housing and access to medications.
- Veterans in a peer-to-peer program had significantly higher senses of empowerment and confidence.
- A metasynthesis showed that those receiving peer support services had increased social networks.
- The following table demonstrates the results of a survey regarding the impacts of CPS training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Score*</th>
<th>Strongly agree/agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your CPS training . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made you develop skills that are applicable to your life and recovery</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>4.54 ± 0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made you more hopeful about your own future</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>4.42 ± 0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave you more confidence you can do things to further your recovery</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>4.38 ± 0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gave you more confidence to seek employment</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>4.15 ± 0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have an ability to impact the agency where you work</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>4.36 ± 0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work gives you an opportunity to give back to others</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>4.8 ± 0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your confidence and sense that you can help yourself and others has increased</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>4.67 ± 0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The work facilitates and allows you to practice your own recovery</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>4.67 ± 0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your job allows you to learn from your peers</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>4.69 ± 0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have opportunities for personal development at agency</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>4.29 ± 0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; and 5 = strongly agree to the statements.
- The following table outlines the outcomes of a variety of peer support programs. xxv

Table 2. Program Description and Outcomes of Peer Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Program Description</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer Employees (Employed Consumers)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon &amp; Draine 1994; 1995 [20-22]</td>
<td>A randomized trial of a team of case managers who are mental health consumers compared to a team of non-consumers.</td>
<td>Recipients of case management (n=94)</td>
<td>Case management services delivered by consumers were as effective as those provided by non-consumers (symptomatology; QOL; social contacts; medication compliance; alliances with clients). Clients served by a consumer team were less satisfied with mental health treatment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felton et al. 1995 [23]</td>
<td>An intensive case-management program with peer specialists.</td>
<td>Recipients of case management (n=104)</td>
<td>Clients served by teams with peer specialists demonstrated greater gains in several areas of QOL and an overall reduction in the number of major life problems experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivera et al. 2007 [26]</td>
<td>Consumer-assisted case management with standard clinic-based care.</td>
<td>Recipients of case management or clinic-based care (n=203)</td>
<td>There were no significant differences between the consumer-assisted program and other programs in terms of symptoms, satisfaction, subjective QOL, objective ratings of contacts with family or friends, and objective ratings of activities and finances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawn et al. 2008 [27]</td>
<td>Early discharge and hospital avoidance support program provided by peers.</td>
<td>Recipients of peer support (n=49)</td>
<td>300 bed days and costs were saved by the peer service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sells et al. 2006; 2008 [18, 19]</td>
<td>Intensive case-management teams that included peer providers.</td>
<td>Recipients of case management (n=137)</td>
<td>Participants who received peer-based services felt that their providers communicated in ways that were more validating and reported more positive provider relationship qualities compared with participants in the control condition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griswold et al. 2010 [25]</td>
<td>Trained peers employed by a local community organization provide a variety of services, including connections to social and rehabilitation services, by arranging appointments and providing transport.</td>
<td>Recipients of psychiatric emergency care (n=175)</td>
<td>Participants with peer support were significantly more likely to make connections to primary medical care.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer-Led (Peer-Run) Programs</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinman et al. 2001 [15]</td>
<td>An outreach and engagement program developed, staffed, and managed entirely by mental health consumers.</td>
<td>Recipients of consumer-run service or outpatient service (n=158)</td>
<td>Re-hospitalization rate. (No difference between the intervention group and the control group.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanos et al. 2001 [28]</td>
<td>Programs that are staffed and operated completely by self-described mental health consumers provide services such as self-help, activity groups, and drop-in groups.</td>
<td>Recipients of mental health services (n=60)</td>
<td>Involvement in self-help services was associated with better community adjustment, the use of more coping strategies, and a greater proportion of problem-centered coping strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrigan 2006 [29]</td>
<td>Consumer-operated services.</td>
<td>People with psychiatric disability (n=1824)</td>
<td>Participation in peer support was positively correlated with recovery or empowerment factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson et al. 2007 [30]</td>
<td>Consumer / survivor initiatives run by and for people with mental illness.</td>
<td>Participants of peer-run organization (n=102)</td>
<td>Continuously active participants scored significantly higher on a measure of community integration than the non-active group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mutual Help Groups</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Galanter 1988 [31]</td>
<td>Self-help program designed by a psychiatrist to help participants cope with general psychiatric disorders.</td>
<td>Participants in self-help group (n=356)</td>
<td>A decline was found in both symptoms and concomitant psychiatric treatment after subjects joined the self-help group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson et al. 1999 [32]</td>
<td>Peer group work, including welcoming members, check-in, group discussion, planning a recreational outing and check-out</td>
<td>Participants in peer support groups (n=165)</td>
<td>Maintained independent or semi-independent living, an increase in the use of community resources and an increase in the size of the social support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Increased engagement rates
- Peer support led to improved relationships with providers & social supports, increased satisfaction with the treatment experience overall, reduced rates of relapse, increased retention in treatment.\textsuperscript{xxvi}
- Programs like WRAP increase self-advocacy with providers.\textsuperscript{xxvii}
- Individuals working with peers felt more empowered to be outspoken about pursuing their goals.\textsuperscript{xxviii}
- HARP participants had significantly greater improvement in patient activation than those in usual care.\textsuperscript{xxix}
- When trained peers employed by a local community organization provide a variety of services, including connections to social and rehabilitation services, arranging appointments and providing transport, participants with peer support are significantly more likely to make connections to primary medical care.\textsuperscript{xxx}
- Participants who received peer-based services felt that their providers communicated in ways that were more validating and reported more positive provider relationship qualities compared with participants in the control condition.\textsuperscript{xxxi}
- A Mental Health America and Kaiser Permanente Peer Support Pilot Study showed participants who received peer support had increased trust in services and increased team collaboration.\textsuperscript{xxxii}

Increased whole health
- The preliminary study findings of the Peer Support Whole Health and Resiliency (PSWHR) randomized controlled trial demonstrated the following results; \textsuperscript{xxxiii}
  - 100% self-reported reaching whole health goal
    - Sample goals: eat five healthy meals per week, jog 20 minutes twice a week, eat seven servings of fruits and vegetables a week, etc.
  - Significant decreases in bodily pain, significant increases in hopefulness
  - Participants reported an average of 3.8 health conditions
  - 100% liked getting peer support
  - 78% of PSWHR participants were very satisfied
  - 100% strongly liked listening to other people’s challenges & successes
- 100% strongly liked the chance to form a meaningful relationship with PSWHR teachers
- 100% strongly liked the focus on setting simple, achievable health goals
- 89% self-reported improvement in whole health since starting PSWHR
- Individuals receiving peer support show a significant decrease in substance use.xxxiv

**Existing State-Level Standards for Certification**

- Based on the research done by the Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health, The following statements indicate the differences in peer support standards.xxxv
  - Extent of work/professional experience
  - Extent of involvement as a peer leader or doing peer support
  - Differences in the number of hours before taking the exams
  - Differences in recertification/continuing education requirements
  - Individuals must self-identify as a peer vs. provide documentation of diagnosis/treatment in the mental health care system
  - Criminal background check required by some but not most
  - Substance use disorder as co-occurring vs. primary
  - Length of time in recovery differs (range if specified: 6 months – 2 years)
  - Exam requirement (e.g. Wyoming has no exam, only requires that certain documents be provided showing training)

- As of May 2018, 45 states and the District of Columbia have established or are developing programs to train and certify peer specialists. Five states had no certification and no process or plan to develop or implement one.xxxvi
  - States planning certification include: Arkansas, Colorado, Mississippi, Nevada, New Hampshire, Vermont
  - States without certification include: Alaska, California, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota

- As of January 2017, States reimbursing peer support through Medicaid:xxxvii

**National Certification**
• As of March 2017, Mental Health America (MHA) launched the first national, advanced peer support specialist certification. The MHA National Certified Peer Specialist (NCPS) certification has the following requirements:
  - Hold current state certification with a minimum training requirement of 40 hours OR hold a certificate of completion of an MHA approved training program;
  - 3,000 hours verifiable work and/or volunteer experience providing peer support services in the with the last six years
  - One supervisory letter of recommendation for certification
  - One professional letter of recommendation for certification
  - High School Diploma or General Equivalency Degree
  - 10 hours per year of Continuing Education Units (20 CEUS per two-year renewal period)
• Individuals with the MHA NCPS certification must pass a 125-question examination across the following six domains of practice:
  - Foundations of Peer Support
  - Foundations of Healthcare Systems
  - Mentoring, Shared Learning and Relationship Building
  - Activation and Self-Management
  - Advocacy
  - Professional and Ethical Responsibilities

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iii Ibid.
v Bergeson 2011.
vi Ibid.
vi Ibid.
ix Ibid.