

# Peer Services

Mental Health America (MHA) believes that peer support is a unique and essential element of recovery-oriented mental health and substance abuse systems.

## What are peer services?

Peer support programs provide an opportunity for consumers who have achieved significant recovery to assist others in their recovery journeys. Peer specialists model recovery, teach skills and offer supports to help people experiencing mental health challenges lead meaningful lives in the community. Peer specialists promote recovery; enhance hope and social networking through role modeling and activation; and supplement existing treatment with education, empowerment, and aid in system navigation.

## Why are peer services important?

Research shows that the use of peer specialists, allows states to save mental health program dollars by reducing hospitalizations and other emergency interventions, and increases peoples' participation in the community. And people with mental illness who are helped by peers tend to experience more thorough and longer-lasting recoveries.

Following pioneering work in Georgia, an increasing number of states are successfully implementing independent peer support services programs that bill Medicaid directly. At least 30 states consider peer services a Medicaid reimbursable service.

## What do peer specialists do?

Peer support specialists work in a variety of roles that include but are not limited to:

- independent peer support
- case management
- peer wellness coaching
- education and advocacy
- active participants on treatment teams in a full range of clinical settings, including crisis services
- peer navigator or bridgers—helping people to navigate community services and supports
- peer-run support groups and warm lines

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*Optum Health , (n.d.). Enhancing consumer-centered recovery: Building programs, finding solutions, and expanding services. Retrieved from website: <http://www.optumhealth.com/~media/OptumHealth/Podcast/Pdfs/Publications/WP-Enhancing-Consumer-Centered-Recovery.pdf>*

*Vestal, C. (2013, September 11). "peers" seen easing mental health worker shortage. Kaiser Health News. Retrieved from <http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/stories/2013/september/11/peer-mental-health-workers.aspx>*

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