



IOWA Peer Support Training Academy

The Importance of Peer Support Services as Core Services

It has come to our attention that Peer Support Services have not been listed among the Core Services to be mandated for inclusion within each of the regions under all versions of the Redesign Bill. Instead, Peer-Run Self Help Centers have been listed among important, but not necessarily mandated entities that should be available within each region. When we talk about Peer Support Services, we want to be sure it is understood that Peer Support Services can be delivered in Peer Run Self Help Centers; however, they should not be limited to delivery in any one specific place. Peer Support Services are evidence-based and reimbursable through Medicaid and are presently being offered through many community mental health centers (CMHCs) as well as other health care providers within the state. The vast majority of Peer Support Services are not being delivered in "Peer-run Self Help Centers," CMHCs and other mental health services providers are able to negotiate their contracts with Magellan to include Peer Support Services and these evidence based services are delivered by Peer Support Specialists. In Iowa, Peer Support Specialists work in community mental health centers, recovery centers, veteran's service centers, workforce centers, and Integrated Health Home pilot projects. Peer Support Services may be offered in an individual or group setting. In recent years, other states have utilized peer support specialists in inpatient units, hospital emergency rooms and other settings as advocates and support persons for the individual accessing care. It has also been suggested that Peer Support Specialists be utilized within the criminal justice system to provide mental health supports.

What is Peer Support?

A trend has emerged in the delivery and funding of mental health services during the last decade toward increased consumer involvement in treatment planning and decision making. The 2003 President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health emphasized the philosophy of recovery: a person-centered approach focused on education, illness management, personal responsibility, self-advocacy, and empowerment. Peer Support Services, which are delivered by individuals with life experience of mental illness, to others with lived experience, include the use of the recovery experience of the Peer Support Specialist as a tool to help the recipient of Peer Support. The services include the sharing of experiential knowledge, skills, and social learning, and are increasingly viewed around the country as evidence based services for states to include in their array of community based mental health services. Peer Support was included as 1 of the 10 fundamental components of recovery in a consensus statement that was released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in 2006. The Iowa Peer Support Training Academy, established in 2006, trains individuals in recovery to become Peer Support Specialists serving the mental health system throughout Iowa.

For more information about Peer Support and the "Pillars of Peer Support Services Summits" in 2009, 2010 and 2011, which led to increased recognition of Peer Support Services as evidence-based practices and these services becoming Medicaid billable in approximately thirty states, please visit: www.pillarsofpeersupport.org/about.php.

Jessica Perry, a Peer Support Specialist at the Hillcrest Wellness Center in Dubuque says, "When people don't know about peer support services, I notice them talking about the need to talk to someone in addition to their therapist, and they want it to be someone they can trust with personal information. Peer Support serves as a sounding board and a way for people to have greater accessibility to support. There is less shame involved in telling another person in recovery about things like thoughts of suicide."

Peer Support Specialists have also said, "We can cater Peer Support Services to the whole person; right now I am helping a person learn computer skills, since that is a part of the individual's employment goals for the future."

"Peer Support helps people realize that they can take responsibility for themselves and their own recovery, since they see others have done so."

In closing, we want to request that you make certain that "Peer Support Services" are added to the list of mandated core services to be available in all areas of the state. This language must be added to the House version of the Redesign legislation and must not be removed as additional drafts are written and changes are made. Peer Support Services are among the most important services as viewed by individuals seeking mental health services and are being embraced all over the country as an essential part of any well-functioning mental health system. We thank you for your long hard work and appreciate you working with us on this much needed change in the system of the state.

Sincerely,

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