



Navigating the Peer Worker Experience

What is a Peer Worker?



The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines peer support workers as persons who have been successful in the recovery process and help others experiencing similar situations. Through shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment, peer support workers help people become and stay engaged in the recovery process and reduce the likelihood of relapse.

Why Do Peer Workers Matter?

Peer support services can extend the reach of treatment and expand access to recovery and recovery support beyond the clinical setting into the everyday environments of those seeking a successful, sustained recovery.

Peer support workers bring their own personal knowledge of what it is like to live and thrive with mental health conditions and substance use disorders. They support progress towards recovery and self-determined lives by sharing vital information gained through experience, and real examples of the power of recovery.

Common Responsibilities of Peer Workers



- Advocating for people in recovery
- Building community, skills, and relationships
- Leading recovery groups
- Mentoring and setting goals
- Providing emotional support
- Linkage to community resources
- Advocating for participant needs
- Reducing stigma and isolation
- Supporting engagement in services and treatment

Peer worker roles may also extend to:

- Providing services and training
- Supervising other peer workers
- Developing resources
- Administering programs or agencies
- Educating the public and policymakers

Common Barriers:



- Lack of funding or resources
- Lack of equity with other professionals
- High turnover because of low pay and/or limited career advancement
- Staff burnout

How to Support Peer Workers:

- Establish clear professional boundaries
- Seek ongoing supervision and mentorship
- Participate in peer support networks
- Utilize self-care and wellness strategies
- Continue professional development
- Celebrate progress and small victories