



Peer coach and support services



Shifting the treatment model from
symptom relief to recovery

At Optum, we believe that integrating consumer-centered, recovery-oriented approaches with the current medical model of treatment has enormous potential.



Empowerment — the key to lasting recovery

Optum peer coach and support services help behavioral health clients transition from hospitalization to community life, build resiliency and reduce their need for readmission.

As value-based care assumes greater significance in how states manage complex populations, solutions to the frequent hospitalization of behavioral health clients take on added importance. Optum® peer coach and support services offer a consumer-centered, recovery-oriented mental health and substance use model that taps into client motivators and focuses on inner strengths.

Older models of treatment tend to focus on symptoms, illness and individual deficiencies. The recovery model, however, empowers those with mental health or substance use disorder to live purposeful lives and make positive change based on their strengths.

In recent years, counties and states throughout the country have partnered with external firms with Medicaid expertise to assist in developing and implementing recovery-oriented behavioral health systems of care. Optum peer coach and support services have helped several public health systems successfully transform their mental health and substance use treatment programs to focus on helping people achieve long-term recovery.

Peer support: An essential component of a recovery-oriented approach

Peer support is an integral part of our recovery-oriented approach to behavioral health. A peer is an individual who has had several years in recovery. Peers are trained to help people currently dealing with a mental health or substance use disorder by providing support, encouragement and links to community resources. Receiving help from people who've "been there" can reduce isolation and foster hope.

Optum has facilitated the incorporation of peer support services into public mental health systems in more than 20 states, resulting in better adherence to follow-up treatment, fewer unnecessary re-hospitalizations and significant cost savings for local governments. We have reduced rehospitalizations 51-70 percent, depending on the market.

Setting and implementing recovery goals in the context of a supportive peer environment can lead to increased medication adherence and reduced hospitalization.¹

1. John A. Rush, MD, PhD, 1999; Mark S. Salzer, Ph.D. 2002, Dumont, J. & Jones, K. 2002.

How peer support facilitates recovery

Optum employs trained peer specialists or recovery coaches to contact members within 24 hours of hospital discharge or 24 hours of referral to community-based outpatient treatment. Their goal is to support the members' engagement in community treatment, support programs, evidence-based self-care tools and strategies, to build on the members' strengths and to help them communicate their needs and goals with their providers. These strategies minimize the members' use of hospital emergency rooms and need for hospitalization.

Not only do these strategies help break the inpatient readmission cycle, but they assist the members in the development of the support structures and resiliency-building skills needed to advance toward recovery.

We have five coaching models in place:

- Peer coach (adult mental health)
- Recovery coach (adult addiction recovery)
- Whole health coach (mental health, addiction, physical health)
- Peer bridge (available in New York only)
- Family support partner (parent or guardian of a child less than 18 years of age)

Peer responsibilities include:

- Understanding the concerns and needs of the member and offer support, encouragement and hope based on the mutuality of the lived experience
- Helping the member state their recovery goals in terms that make sense to them and reflects, in their own words, their personal values and motivations, then helping the member identify what actions they need to take to achieve those goals, and encouraging and supporting them to take those actions
- Offering the member a range of engagement and activation tools, such as WRAP, symptom tracking, journaling and the creation of advance directives. (See "Activation tools," next page.) The member can use these tools to manage symptoms, build wellness, manage anxiety, cope with escalating symptoms, plan for crisis, increase communication with family, friends and providers, build support networks and maintain wellness.
- Supporting the individual's agreement to treatment adherence through the creation of tips and strategies that the member believes will work
- Working with the member before each psychiatrist and therapy appointment to help the member consider what they need to communicate in order to maximize their time with their provider
- Orienting the member to community resources, such as support groups, drop-in centers, food banks, clothing closets, places the member can volunteer to build back their confidence, job placement and supported employment resources, housing resources, transportation assistance, and programs to help the member pay for utilities
- Helping the member relearn and build confidence in everyday tasks, such as riding a bus, grocery shopping and going to a laundromat
- Providing wellness coaching to address overall health and wellness

Peer support reduces inpatient days by 30-63 percent and lowers overall behavioral health costs by 24-47 percent.

Activation tools help members takes steps toward recovery

Our peer coaching and support services help people achieve their recovery goals in ways that work most effectively for them. Our programs, resources and tools include:

- **Recovery tool kits for mental health, addiction recovery and families.** These include interactive digital tools, videos, games, radio shows and apps. These tools were developed by Optum as well as SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration), NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) and others.
- **Activation tool sheets.** These tear-off sheets are available for use by clinicians and others to share activation tools and strategies to help members build resiliency and move toward recovery.
- **Just-diagnosed videos and videos for hope.** These inspiring videos provide information and hope to mental health consumers, individuals in recovery and family members.
- **Whole health action management.** Using the SAMHSA/HRSA Center for Integrated Health program, we train peer coaches to lead whole health groups to support setting and meeting goals in 10 dimensions of health.
- **Online and face-to-face support groups.** Peer coaches refer members to online and in-person support groups. Optum is the only MCO offering Support Groups Central's best-in-class online support groups, which help those whose health condition or rural location makes it difficult to attend a support group in person.
- **Seeking Safety Group for trauma and substance use.** Optum is the only MCO with permission to train peers to lead this evidence-based practice for trauma and substance use-informed care.



Optum currently provides peer coaching and support services in 22 states. To learn how we can help you implement or build peer coaching services and support in your state or locality, please contact us at **1-866-223-4603** or **outcomes@optum.com**.



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