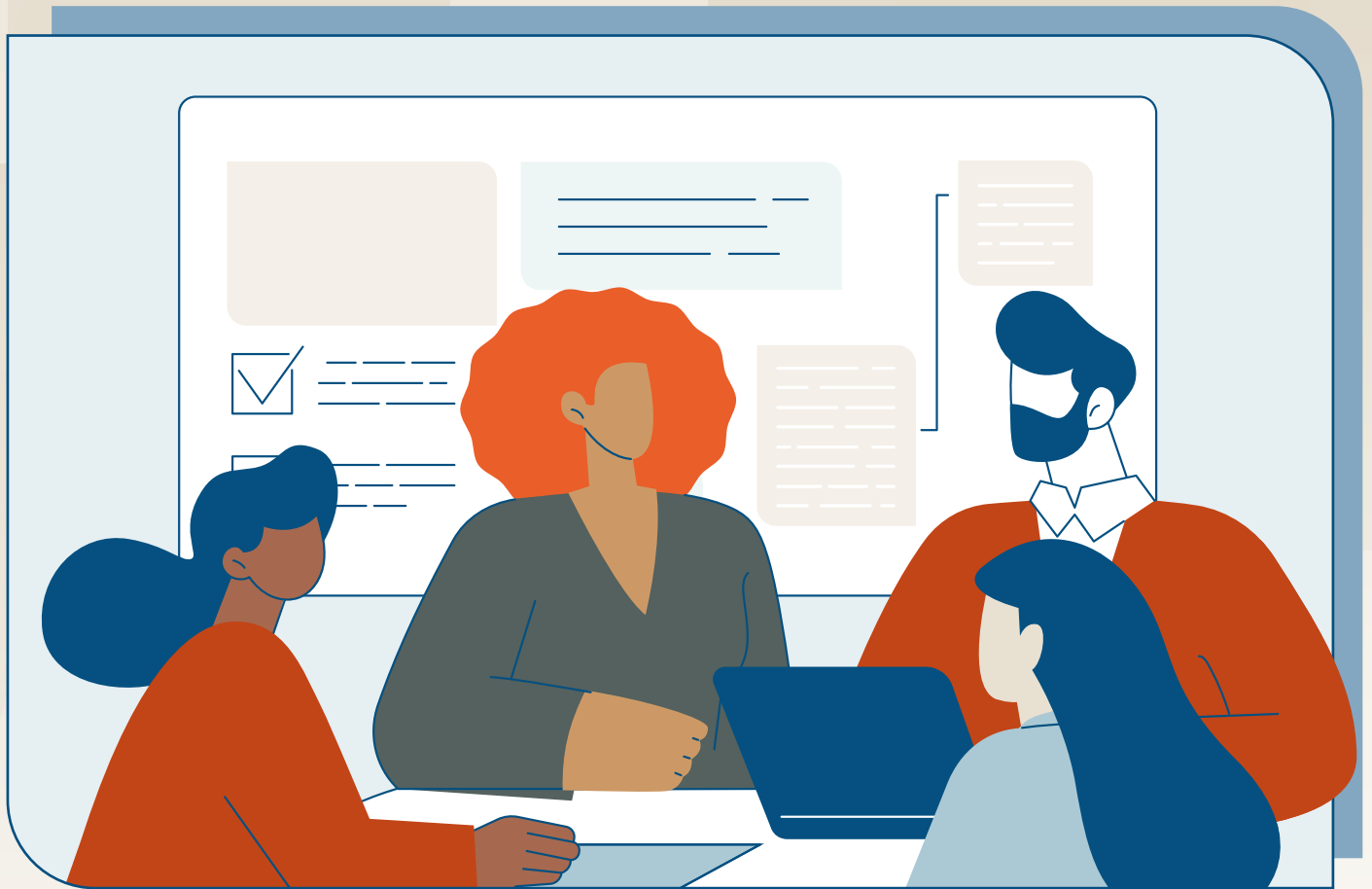


LEARNING AND RESOURCE GUIDE:

Establishing Strong Peer Support Programs and Practices in CCBHCs



**The Alliance
for Rights
and Recovery**

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Background and Overview

The Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) is an effective model to provide access to coordinated, comprehensive, person-centered behavioral health care, regardless of an individual’s ability to pay, place of residence or age. To reach these goals and establish uniform standards across the country, CCBHCs must meet a set of six program requirements, with specific criteria developed by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and to deliver nine required services. This guide focuses on the CCBHC requirement to deliver peer supports, peer counseling and family/caregiver supports.

Establishing robust peer support programs and practices within CCBHCs is vital to fostering an environment where recovery is supported through lived experience, mutual respect and shared understanding. Peer support, as an integral part of behavioral health services, offers unique insights and valuable assistance to people on their recovery journey. This comprehensive resource guide provides essential tools, competencies and strategies to develop and strengthen peer support programs within CCBHCs.

In 2024, the [CCBHC-Expansion Grantee National Training and Technical Assistance Center](#) partnered with the Alliance for Rights and Recovery on a webinar series to support CCBHCs in strong peer support implementation. The series covered four key areas: assessing organizational readiness, establishing the role of peer support in CCBHC service delivery, quality supervision and education for peer staff, and authentic integration of peer voice. This guide summarizes the content of that series.

Toolkit Purpose and Terminology Note This guide helps CCBHCs understand promising and best practices in implementing peer support programming and organizational approaches. For the purposes of this paper, the terms “peer support worker” and “peer support staff” are used interchangeably to signify trained and/or certified peer staff with lived/living experience of mental health challenges, substance use and/or relevant family caregiving.

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CCBHC Peer Requirements

Regarding peer services, Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) Criterion 4.j.1 states:

The CCBHC is responsible for directly providing, or through a DCO [Designated Collaborating Organization], peer supports, including peer specialist and recovery coaches, peer counseling, and family/caregiver supports. Peer services may include peer-run wellness and recovery centers; youth/young adult peer support; recovery coaching; peer-run crisis respites; warmlines; peer-led crisis planning; peer navigators to assist individuals transitioning between different treatment programs and especially between different levels of care; mutual support and self-help groups; peer support for older adults; peer education and leadership development; and peer recovery services. (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2023)

The CCBHC Certification Criteria defines peer support as follows:

A peer support provider is a person who uses their lived experience of recovery from mental or substance use disorders or as a family member/caregiver of such a person, plus skills learned in formal training, to deliver services to promote recovery and resiliency. Peer providers may have titles that may differ from state to state, e.g., certified peer specialist, peer support specialist, recovery coach, family partner, parent partner specialist. In states where Peer Support Services are covered through the state Medicaid Plans, the title of “certified peer specialist” often is used. SAMHSA recognizes states use different terminology for these providers. Peer support may be provided in behavioral health, health, and community settings, e.g., mobile crisis outreach, psychiatric rehabilitation, outpatient mental health/substance use treatment, emergency rooms, wellness programs, peer-operated programs. (SAMHSA, 2023)

CCBHCs have several options for how they can meet this service delivery criterion, including:

- Direct delivery of peer support services
- DCO engagement with a peer-run organization for provision of peer support services
- Partnership with peer-run organizations to provide training, technical assistance and/or supervision for peer support services

In addition to delivery of peer support services, the CCBHC criteria include several other requirements related to peers:

- **Criterion 1.b.2:** “The staffing plan is informed by the community needs assessment and includes clinical, peer, and other staff. [...] The CCBHC must include staff with expertise in addressing trauma and promoting the recovery of children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbance (SED) and adults with serious mental illness (SMI). Examples of staff include a combination of the following: [...] (9) certified/trained peer specialist(s)/recovery coaches, (10) licensed addiction counselors, (11) certified/trained family peer specialists [...].”
- **Criterion 1.c.1:** “At orientation and annually thereafter, the CCBHC must provide training on risk assessment; suicide and overdose prevention and response; and the roles of family and peer staff.”
- **Criterion 3.c.2:** CCBHC protocols for transitioning individuals from other settings include, as appropriate, provision for peer services.
- **Criterion 3.c.3:** “The CCBHC has partnerships with a variety of community or regional services, supports, and providers.” The list of recommended/example partners includes “peer-operated programs.”

Foundations of Peer Support

Peer support is a collaborative relationship between individuals experiencing mental health, substance use or trauma-related challenges and trained peer support workers with similar lived experience. It's based on shared understanding, empathy and mutual support, and it aims to promote recovery and resilience. Peers use their lived/living experience in unique ways as part of their scope of practice. This willingness to use shared experiences creates a sense of authenticity, builds a foundation of trust, provides a relatable perspective, fosters genuine connection and reduces stigma.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PEER SUPPORT

According to its five key principles, effective peer support must be:

- Recovery-oriented, emphasizing each individual's potential for recovery, recognizing multiple pathways to recovery and promoting empowerment, hope and resilience.
- Person-centered, focusing on the individual's unique experiences, strengths, hopes, preferences, needs and goals.
- Voluntary, respecting an individual's autonomy in their own recovery journey. Participation is entirely the individual's choice.
- Relationship-focused, building collaborative, respectful, trusting and authentic relationships where the peer supporter functions as a role model who offers empathy, mutuality, understanding and shared experiences.
- Trauma-informed, recognizing the prevalence and impact of trauma and emphasizing a strengths-based approach for providing emotional, physical and psychological safety conducive to healing from trauma.

KEY RESOURCES

These resources provide deeper knowledge and education on the peer model, values and competencies.

- **Peer Support CORE Competencies:** A resource that outlines the core competencies necessary for effective peer support, including skills in communication, boundary setting and ethical considerations. It serves as a benchmark for training and development of peer support workers.
- **Peer Support Infographic:** A visual representation that highlights the benefits of peer support in mental health and substance use recovery. This infographic is a useful tool for advocacy and education within organizations.
- **Value of Peers, 2017:** A detailed report that provides an in-depth analysis of the impact of peer support, including evidence-based outcomes and the role of peer workers in enhancing recovery-oriented systems of care.

Assessing Organizational Readiness and Planning for Implementation of Peer Support in CCBHCs

Many organizations establish or expand their peer support programming as part of becoming a CCBHC. Peers are among the most commonly hired new staff at CCBHCs, with 77% of CCBHCs reporting they had created additional peer support staff positions (National Council, 2024).

But peer integration is a process, not an immediate outcome. It requires long-term infrastructure to support people with lived experience who work in behavioral health systems. CCBHCs are encouraged to assess their readiness to integrate peer-delivered services. This process can be useful whether an organization already delivers some level of peer-delivered services or not. It provides an opportunity for self-reflection and identifies areas for improvement moving forward. CCBHCs are encouraged to come back to these elements, continually assess their progress and refine accordingly to maintain their alignment with peer values.

When assessing readiness, CCBHCs should also consider their sustainability plan for integrating peer services. Many times, these programs are initially funded or rely on short-term grants, creating instability. CCBHCs can leverage these funds to invest in creating the strongest program, but they must also plan for sustainability.

The Organizational Self-assessment for Integrating Peer-delivered Services in CCBHCs (National Council, 2023) is a valuable tool to guide the self-assessment process. It consists of four change concepts that characterize an integrated peer-delivered services approach, with a set of goals for each one. The following strategies and tactics support each change concept:

■ **Change Concept 1: Creating healthy partnerships with peer-run organizations and internal peer support staff**

- Partner with existing peer-led organizations to explore models for service delivery, technical assistance, supporting peer staff hiring, training and supervision.
- Engage peer staff and people with lived experience in regular assessments to create a more recovery-oriented organizational culture and improve readiness and support for peer roles.
- Foster ongoing collaboration with peer-led organizations, and establish clear roles, responsibilities, job descriptions and performance metrics for peer support staff.

■ **Change Concept 2: Shifting organizational culture**

- Ensure the organization's mission, vision and values reflect a commitment to integrating peer-delivered services and recovery-oriented care.
- Make peer services and roles clear at all levels, treating peer staff as valued partners within care teams.
- Develop plans to address and eliminate power differentials between clinical and peer staff, ensuring fairness.
- Provide organization-wide training on recovery, peer-oriented workplace culture and peer leadership, reinforcing the professional value of peer support workers.
- Ensure representation of people with lived experience in leadership roles, including on governing boards.

- Measure and track outcomes related to recovery and community participation.
- Establish processes to elevate the value of peer support workers as trained, experienced professionals.

■ **Change Concept 3: Maintaining fidelity to peer support**

- Implement mechanisms to maintain the integrity of peer support services.
- Define peer staff roles with clear job descriptions, competencies and scope of practice, ensuring organizational understanding of these roles.
- Involve peer staff and people with lived experience in new employee orientation.
- Understand and align state certifications with internal policies, and ensure proper credentialing of peer workers.
- Provide supervision, training, career development and leadership opportunities for peer staff, either internally or in partnership with external organizations.
- Develop policies to reinforce the role and scope of peer workers and recovery support workers within the organization.

■ **Change Concept 4: Integrating peer services into mainstream funding**

- Establish a value proposition and routinely engage with payers, sharing recovery outcomes to demonstrate the medical necessity and value of peer services.
- Advocate with payers to incorporate recovery-oriented outcomes — such as quality of life and community participation — into value-based payment models. Advocate for fair, competitive, and livable compensation for peer workers, regardless of their role, job title, or geographic location. Consider recovery-oriented outcome measures for peer-delivered services or approaches to build off existing/validated outcome measures that are tied to the impacts of peer-delivered services.

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF PEER SUPPORT

Successful integration of peer programming requires organizational readiness. This involves aligning people, processes, systems and performance measurement. Change management is crucial. The [McKinsey 7-S framework](#) provides a useful assessment tool, measuring style, skills, systems, structure, staff, strategy and shared values. The shift to a recovery-oriented system requires ongoing education for leadership, staff and the broader system. Key stakeholders must be identified and engaged. Leadership buy-in is critical, as is prioritizing people with lived experience when hiring for leadership positions.

Peer support workers bring invaluable lived experience and understanding to the assessment process. They can identify potential impediments, suggest strategies to overcome them, assess workforce training needs, provide guidance on establishing effective peer support programs, and ensure that the voices and perspectives of those who will benefit from peer support services are heard and prioritized.



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Readiness Assessment*

Use the McKinsey 7-S framework to assess your organization's readiness for peer support integration. Brainstorm with an interdisciplinary team (including peers) about the best way to leverage peer support workers' expertise at every stage of the assessment and implementation process.

- **Style:** This concerns organizational culture and how you do things.
- **Skills:** What institutional and staff skills do you need that you may not have? Are there things you may need to outsource?
- **Structure:** How is your internal hierarchy structured? Is it clear or overly complex? Do you have a well-developed organizational chart that delineates these relationships?
- **Staff:** How are you developing the talents and abilities of the people in your organization?
- **Strategy:** What is your organization doing to maintain its strategic advantage? Is this process dynamic? How are you evolving it?
- **Shared values:** What is the organization's mission? Is it relevant and well communicated?

IMPLEMENTATION, EVALUATION AND ONGOING SUPPORT

Data collection, analysis and decision-making

Systematic data collection and analysis are essential for evaluating the impact of peer support, informing decisions and ensuring ongoing funding. This includes assessing the organizational culture, mission, leadership commitment, staff attitudes, training and program infrastructure.

Identifying and addressing impediments and challenges

Many potential impediments can hinder the successful implementation of peer support. These include stigma, lack of awareness and understanding, inadequate resources, resistance to change, limited training, communication and coordination problems, and challenges in measuring impact. These can be overcome through proper assessment, preparation and partnerships.



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Impediments and Solutions*

- Identify potential impediments to peer program implementation.
- Analyze their root causes.
- Propose solutions.

Leveraging partnerships with peer organizations

Partnerships with peer-run organizations are crucial for successful integration. These partnerships yield multiple benefits, including:

- **Expertise and experience:** Peer organizations possess unique insights and knowledge that can improve the quality of support and services provided.
- **Authentic peer engagement:** Peer organizations can facilitate the involvement of individuals with lived experience in decision-making processes, program design and service delivery.
- **Training and support:** Peer organizations can equip peer staff with the necessary skills to provide effective support, through access to training programs, supervision and mentorship opportunities that build the capacity of peers to provide meaningful support.
- **Peer-driven initiatives:** Peer organizations are often at the forefront of peer-driven initiatives, such as support groups, workshops or advocacy campaigns.
- **Improving outcomes:** The integration of peers has been shown to improve outcomes for individuals receiving support, providing a deeper level of understanding, empathy and encouragement that fosters hope and resilience.
- **Supervision:** Peer-run organizations often offer trauma-informed, wellness-based, reflective supervision that is specialized — helping ensure that peer staff are supported and aligned with the values of peer work.



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Partnership Research*

- Research peer-run organizations in your area.
- Identify potential areas for collaboration.
- Determine which organizations may have the capacity to support your peer program implementation.
- Initiate engagement with those organizations to build relationships and explore opportunities for partnership.

ONGOING ASSESSMENT AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Ongoing assessment is vital for continuous improvement and sustained success of peer support programs. This involves monitoring peer-specific outcomes, gathering feedback from both peer staff and the people they serve, adapting to the unique challenges of peer roles, and ensuring peers maintain meaningful access to supervision and support.

Peer-specific methods for ongoing assessment include:

- **Peer-led work groups and focus groups** to gather authentic input on program effectiveness and workplace culture
- **Recovery-oriented outcome measures** that capture peer support's unique contributions (e.g., hope, empowerment, self-advocacy, community connection)

- **Peer supervision quality assessments** to ensure peers receive adequate support in managing vicarious trauma, boundary setting and role clarity
- **Career pathway tracking** to monitor peer retention, advancement opportunities and professional development
- **Fidelity monitoring** to ensure peer services maintain core values of mutuality, shared power and lived experience
- **Dual feedback loops**, gathering input from both peers and the people they support about relationship quality, context awareness and service accessibility
- **Regular role-clarity discussions** to address tensions between peer and clinical staff roles and prevent role drift

KEY RESOURCES

- **Establishing Strong Peer Support Programs and Practices in CCBHCs — Session One Recording**
- **Organizational Self-assessment for Integrating Peer-delivered Services in CCBHCs**: This self-assessment tool helps organizations evaluate their readiness to implement or improve peer support services within their CCBHCs. It covers aspects such as the organizational culture, training and infrastructure necessary for successful peer support integration.
- **Enduring Ideas: The 7-S Framework**: This strategic framework, originally developed by McKinsey & Company, can be adapted to evaluate and improve organizational alignment in the context of peer support implementation. The 7-S framework covers structure, strategy, systems, skills, style, staff and shared values, all of which are crucial for the successful integration of peer support.
- **Getting Started With Evidence-based Practices: Consumer-operated Services**: This guide from SAMHSA provides an introduction to consumer-operated services, a model that aligns closely with peer support. It offers practical steps for implementing evidence-based practices within consumer-operated settings.



The Role of Peer Support in CCBHC Service Delivery

Integrated systems of care like the CCBHC model bring together multiple service providers and disciplines to provide comprehensive and coordinated mental health and substance use care. They prioritize collaboration, information sharing and holistic approaches to care delivery. It is important to understand how the peer role fits into this model and how it differs from other clinical positions. The role of peer support within an integrated system of care can include:

- Creating connection.
- Promoting recovery.
- Nurturing hope and dignity.
- Reducing stigma.
- Improving access to care.

Peer support workers play a crucial role in strengthening engagement, improving access and promoting recovery-oriented care within integrated systems. They bridge gaps between individuals and their service providers, navigate complex systems and challenge stigmatizing attitudes. Although the role of peer support is not a clinical one, certified peer support is a recognized discipline with professional standards and responsibilities that include:

- **Maintaining boundaries and confidentiality:** Respecting the privacy of the individuals they work with and adhering to confidentiality guidelines.
- **Using collaborative approaches:** Providing a unique perspective that bridges the gap between professional and personal experiences.
- **Advocating for individuals:** Representing the voice and needs of the people they support to ensure their perspectives are considered in decision-making.
- **Promoting self-determination and empowerment:** Helping individuals make their own decisions and take control of their recovery by fostering independence and resilience.
- **Modeling recovery:** Demonstrating personal recovery as a living example of a fulfilling life to inspire and empower others.
- **Adhering to a code of ethics:** Complying with ethical standards that promote integrity and professionalism in their work.
- **Engaging in professional development:** Committing to continuous learning, including quality supervision and continuing education, to maintain and build on their skills.

Peer support workers regularly collaborate with other disciplines and are often members of multidisciplinary teams. Therefore, as CCBHCs establish or expand their peer programming, they should set parameters and educate all staff on the roles and functions of peer support staff, adhering to the core values and principles of the peer model. This includes differentiating peer support from clinical services, adhering to boundaries in peer support, and maintaining fidelity to the peer model.

Differentiating peer support from clinical services

Peer support offers valuable services and perspectives that are backed by research, but it differs from clinical disciplines in several important ways:

- Peer support has a foundation of shared experience and lived expertise.
- It focuses on the healing potential of personal connection and shared narratives.
- It fosters hope by modeling recovery.
- It uses a nonclinical approach.

In keeping with the boundaries and requirements of the peer role and model, it's important for organizations to consider which functions fall outside of the peer role and set clear parameters to avoid role “drift.”

Examples include roles and tasks such as case management, enforcing therapy policies, and monitoring compliance (such as drug screening).



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Interconnectedness*

- Create a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting peer support workers and clinical professionals.
- Focus on roles, training and approaches.

Adhering to boundaries in peer support

As a professional discipline, peer support adheres to appropriate professional boundaries:

- **Consent and confidentiality:** Establish clear boundaries regarding sharing personal information.
- **Empathy without enmeshment:** Encourage empathy and understanding while maintaining a healthy emotional distance.
- **Mutual respect and fairness:** Foster an environment where all participants are treated with respect and dignity. Avoid imposing personal beliefs or solutions, emphasizing fairness and acknowledging varied perspectives.
- **No judgment:** Promote a nonjudgmental atmosphere that allows individuals to express themselves without fear of criticism. Recognize that everyone's journey is unique, and refrain from passing judgment on experiences, choices or coping mechanisms.
- **Limitations of peer support:** Clarify the role and limitations of peer support. Acknowledge that peer support workers are not substitutes for professional mental health services and should guide participants toward seeking appropriate help when necessary.

Maintaining fidelity to the peer model

Commitment to the core values and principles of the peer model is essential to maintaining the fidelity of peer support services in your organization. This includes:

- Valuing lived/living experience.
- Emphasizing hope and recovery.

- Embracing mutuality and reciprocity.
- Using nonclinical and voluntary approaches.
- Recognizing boundaries and limitations.
- Providing quality training and supervision.

It's not unusual for organizations to experience challenges and impediments to maintaining fidelity to the peer model. Common challenges include lack of knowledge and understanding about peer support services and roles within the broader organization; drift in peer roles and functions at an individual and organizational level, often tied to lacking clearly defined job roles; disconnection from a larger peer community that could support peers in strengthening, understanding and maintaining fidelity to the model; and lack of appropriate peer supervision.

Partnerships with peer organizations are a good first step in overcoming these challenges. Partnerships can provide technical assistance, training, supervision and staff support. In addition, organizations can employ strategies like:

- Requiring organization-wide training on peer scope of practice.
- Developing well-defined peer roles, job descriptions and scopes of practice.
- Investing in quality peer supervision.
- Building strong peer networks or supporting peer staff to engage in them.
- Offering continuing education opportunities.
- Supporting peer staff through training on vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue.



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Fidelity Checklist*

- Develop a checklist for evaluating fidelity to the peer support model within your organization.
- Consider the core values and principles of peer support.
- Consider working with a peer-run organization to develop your fidelity standards.
- Determine how you will integrate this checklist into your existing quality assurance processes.



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Overcoming Impediments*

- Rank the listed challenges based on their perceived impact in your organization.
- Consider the listed strategies for overcoming these challenges.
- Brainstorm additional strategies for addressing challenges.
- Develop an action plan to implement at least one of the strategies within your organization.

CCBHC APPROACHES TO PEER SUPPORT AND IMPACT

In 2024, the National Council released a [CCBHC Impact Report](#), offering the most current data on CCBHCs and the vital role they play in their communities. The report emphasizes the critical role peers play in the services provided by CCBHCs. The report highlights an increase the number of peers supporting individuals with substance use disorders (SUDs) and those transitioning from the criminal justice system. It notes the following key contributions:

■ Peer support in SUD services

- **Wide reach:** CCBHCs serve over 373,000 individuals with SUD diagnoses —91% provide direct SUD-related services, while the remaining 9% collaborate with DCOs.
- **Peer support roles:** Peer support workers with SUD-specific training are integral to service delivery. Approximately 60% of CCBHCs have hired peer workers with a focus on SUD, ensuring continuity of care and supporting the community reintegration of individuals from the criminal justice system.

■ Peer support in criminal justice reentry

- **Reentry support:** Nearly 50% of CCBHCs focus on individuals transitioning from incarceration back into their communities. Peer support workers play a critical role in this reentry process by assisting with pre-release screening, referrals and post-release support. Their roles help ensure individuals stay connected to essential services, ultimately supporting their recovery and community reintegration.

■ Peer staff as a key workforce

- **Addressing workforce shortages:** CCBHCs have helped address workforce shortages in behavioral health by significantly increasing staffing, particularly in peer support roles. Peer workers are central to bridging gaps in care and improving service delivery across the system, with 77% of CCBHCs hiring these professionals.

■ Peer engagement in collaborative activities

- **Collaboration with criminal justice:** CCBHCs are forging stronger partnerships with criminal justice agencies, and peers play a central role in these collaborations. Nearly half of CCBHCs engage peers as community navigators or reentry specialists, offering essential support such as legal assistance and career guidance. These peer roles are vital to overcoming impediments to care, supporting successful reintegration and addressing the intersection of substance use, recovery and criminal justice involvement.

KEY RESOURCES

- [Establishing Strong Peer Support Programs and Practices in CCBHCs — Session Two Recording](#)
- [Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics, Peer-delivered Services and Peer-operated Agencies:](#) This brief from the Alliance for Rights and Recovery focuses on how peer/recovery community organizations and CCBHCs can work together to provide an innovative, integrated approach to recovery- oriented peer services that meets the goals of CCBHC adoption.
- [Perspectives: Involving Persons With Lived Experience of Mental Health Conditions in Service Delivery, Development and Leadership:](#) This article explores the importance of involving people with lived experience in all aspects of service delivery and leadership, providing insights into the benefits and challenges of this approach.

The Importance of Quality Supervision and Continuing Education for Peer Support Staff

The purpose of peer supervision is to address peers' administrative, educational and support needs to ensure high-quality peer services that achieve desired peer outcomes.

Supervisors provide guidance to peer workers, promoting competent and ethical delivery of services and supports by helping them develop and apply relevant professional knowledge, skills and values. Effective peer supervision should focus on encouraging professional growth, building a trusting and collaborative supervisory relationship, addressing challenges in the supervision process and promoting self-care. Supervision should also recognize and foster career development pathways for peer support specialists, including opportunities to move into supervisory and leadership roles, further advancing the peer profession.

The key components of effective peer supervision are:

- **Peer-centered approach:** Ensuring that the supervision focuses on the peer worker's needs and growth.
 - **Skill development:** Providing opportunities for peer workers to improve skills such as active listening, empathy and effective communication.
 - **Reflective practice:** Encouraging self-reflection to deepen understanding and improve the quality of peer support.
 - **Boundary management:** Addressing and navigating between the personal and professional aspects of peer support.
 - **Context awareness:** Providing supervision that is sensitive to varied customs and backgrounds and understanding their impact on peer interactions.
 - **Continuous learning:** Promoting an environment where ongoing education is a priority, including a focus on new and emerging best practices and ethical considerations in peer support.
 - **Case review and feedback:** Reviewing peer support interactions and providing constructive feedback to promote improvement.
1. **Supervisor accessibility:** Ensuring that peer workers have access to supervisors for guidance, especially in challenging situations.
 2. **Supporting wellness:** Recognizing the importance of peer worker self-care and wellbeing and integrating it into supervision discussions.
 3. **Ethical considerations:** Ensuring ethical standards are maintained in all aspects of the peer support role.
 4. **Career development pathways:** Encouraging peer support specialists to explore supervisory or leadership roles through mentorship, professional development and training, and supporting them through that process.



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Organizational Reflection*

Gather an interdisciplinary team to reflect on your organizational practices. Ask yourselves:

- How do you ensure ongoing professional development for peer supervisors to maintain the quality of their guidance?
- What opportunities does your organization offer for peer support workers to move into supervisory or leadership roles? What are the impediments? What are the facilitators?
- Is any of your peer supervision provided by certified peer leadership staff?
- In your opinion, what are the most effective elements of your organization's peer supervision?
- What tools or partners did your organization use in the development of its peer supervision process?
- How do you address any potential conflicts or challenges that may arise within the peer supervision process?
- Can you describe the framework or structure in place for regular feedback and evaluation of peer supervision practices?
- How does your organization assess the quality of its peer supervision process (e.g., process assessment, peer worker feedback, peer supervisor feedback, peer supervisor self-assessment, expert collaboration)?
- Can you provide examples of successful outcomes or improvements attributed to the implementation of quality peer supervision in your organization?

ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACHES FOR ESTABLISHING STRONG PEER SUPERVISION AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

To improve the quality and experience of peer supervision, CCBHCs should consider including the following approaches in their programming:

- **Assessing the quality of peer supervision:** Regularly assess the current perception and quality of existing supervision structures. Assessment should include peer worker feedback, supervisor feedback, supervisor self-assessment and collaboration with experienced peer workers to support assessment.
- **Comprehensive training:** This includes onboarding and support (ideally peer-led) for new peer staff and ongoing training for continued growth and development, as well as training in supervisory skills for peer supervisors. CCBHCs should also train all staff in the roles, values and ethical considerations of peer support.
- **Peer-led supervision:** Provide regular, high-quality supervision to support ongoing development. Peer-led supervision- or a dual supervision model, where peer staff receive oversight from both a peer supervisor and a clinical supervisor- is ideal, incorporating the critical components outlines previously.
- **Growth opportunities/career ladders:** Well-designed peer programming creates intentional opportunities for advancement, including pathways for peer support workers to grow into supervisory

roles. Through conscientious planning, organizations can establish career ladders that recognize and build upon the unique skills, lived experience and leadership potential of peer staff. Strong supervision programs not only support ongoing professional development but also provide advocacy and mentorship that prepares peer staff to assume supervisory responsibilities, ensuring the peer workforce is sustainable, valued and equipped for leadership.

- **Expert collaboration:** Peer workers thrive when they are part of professional communities that offer support, education and guidance. Collaboration and peer networks can significantly improve peers' effectiveness.



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Create a Professional Development Plan for Peer Staff*

- Create a sample professional development plan for peer workers in your organization.
- Consider specific training, supervision and growth opportunities.
- Explore state and national training and certification resources for peer support workers.
- Consider career ladders for peer staff in your organization.
- Include strategies to support career advancement and pathways to supervisory roles.

COLLABORATION AND SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR PEER WORKERS

As noted, collaboration with expert organizations and peer networks benefits both peer staff and the CCBHCs they work in. These networks can include:

- **Professional advocacy organizations:** Groups that advocate for and provide resources to peer support professionals.
- **Peer-run organizations:** Organizations led by individuals with lived experience, offering peer support and development opportunities.
- **Learning collaboratives:** Opportunities for peer workers to learn from one another, share best practices and improve their skills.
- **Peer support networks:** Communities of peer workers where experiences, resources and expertise are shared.
- **Communities of practice:** Groups where peer workers can exchange knowledge, share experiences and support one another's development.

The benefits of collaboration with these expert organizations and networks can include:

- **Sharing best practices:** Peer workers can exchange experiences, resources and knowledge, improving service delivery.
- **Access to quality supervision:** Peer support networks ensure peer workers have access to competent supervisors who understand the peer role and function and can provide guidance and support. This can be particularly helpful for CCBHCs that have limited capacity for current peer staff to supervise others.

- **Professional development:** Peer networks help workers access further training and education, keeping them current with best practices and evolving methodologies.
- **Peer expertise:** Collaboration among peers fosters a sense of community and leverages collective expertise.



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Create a Peer Support Collaboration Network*

- Brainstorm strategies for building and strengthening peer support networks within your organization and community..
- Research and list local and national peer support organizations and networks.
- Proactively reach out to local and national resources to gather information on opportunities for collaboration and professional development.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Peer staff growth and development is often also impacted by other challenges, such as low wages and earning potential. There are limited career pathways and leadership opportunities, and challenges in acquiring certification creates impediments to entering or advancing in the field. CCBHCs should consider their opportunities to remove these impediments within their organizational system or through partnerships..

KEY RESOURCES

- **[Establishing Strong Peer Support Programs and Practices in CCBHCs — Session Three Recording](#)**
- **[Supervision of Peer Workers Technical Assistance Resource](#):** Guidelines and best practices for the supervision of peer workers, ensuring that they receive the support needed to be effective in their roles.
- **[Supervision of Peer Workers](#):** A comprehensive guide focused on the unique aspects of supervising peer workers, including fostering a supportive environment, managing challenges and strengthening their opportunities for professional development.
- **[Supervisor of Peer Workers Self-assessment](#):** A tool for supervisors to evaluate their readiness and effectiveness in overseeing peer workers. This self-assessment helps identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.
- **[Resources for the Supervision of Peer Workers](#):** An extensive collection of materials designed to aid in the supervision of peer workers, including best practices, case studies and training modules.
- **[Expanding Peer Support and Supporting the Peer Workforce in Mental Health](#):** A SAMHSA issue brief reviewing current standards, best practices and approaches to including peers and peer support as an essential component of service delivery for behavioral health.
- **[Roadmap to Peer Support: Implementing a Peer Support Program](#):** A resource from Johns Hopkins that provides valuable insights and recommendations on the roles and experiences of peers, how to provide support to peers, and practices for recruitment, retention and training.

Integrating Authentic Peer Voice Into Your Organizational Culture

DEFINITION OF PEER VOICE

Peer voice refers to the unique insights, perspectives and narratives expressed by those who have personally faced similar challenges or circumstances. It illustrates the value of learning from people who have firsthand experience in a particular area, such as mental health challenges substance use. Peer voice promotes understanding

Reflection Question

Think about a time when you were able to help someone based on your personal experiences. How does this help illustrate the value of peer voice?

BENEFITS OF INCORPORATING PEER VOICE IN DECISION-MAKING

Incorporating peer voice into organizational decision-making brings numerous benefits, including:

- **Identifying system gaps:** Peer input helps uncover overlooked needs and gaps in existing systems.
- **Improved service access:** Peer perspectives can drive more effective outreach, ensuring services reach those who need them.
- **Better service delivery:** Peer involvement strengthens service delivery by aligning programs with real-world needs and experiences.
- **Improved outcomes:** Peer-driven solutions often result in more meaningful, impactful outcomes.
- **Increased empathy:** Hearing from peers cultivates empathy among other staff and the broader community.
- **Improved problem-solving:** Peer perspectives enrich decision-making and problem-solving processes.
- **Better understanding of end-user needs:** Peer input ensures that programs and policies are more closely aligned with the needs of people receiving services.





DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Reflection and System Mapping*

Gather an interdisciplinary team. Starting with reflection, ask yourselves:

- Does your organization currently have people with lived/living experience serving on the board of directors?
- Are people with lived/living experience serving on other committees or decision-making bodies?
- What are some examples of groups on which staff, service recipients or community members with lived/living experience serve in your organization?

Proceed with system mapping:

- Map out your organization's service delivery model.
- Highlight potential gaps.
- Brainstorm with peers on how people with lived experiences might fill these gaps.

CREATING AN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE THAT VALUES PEER VOICE

Creating a supportive environment for peer voice involves change management, leadership development, comprehensive training and celebrating the contributions of staff with lived experience. This includes several strategies, such as:

- **Creating a welcoming, respectful environment** that encourages open dialogue and values varied experiences, including those of peers. A successful organizational culture requires endorsement from top leadership. Leaders should actively promote and participate in initiatives that showcase the value of authentic peer voice.
- **Recognizing the value of lived experience**, acknowledging the importance of personal perspectives and ensuring they are treated with respect. This should include a structured and consistent recognition program for peer staff, as well as metrics and feedback mechanisms that assess and demonstrate the value of peer programs.
- **Empowering individuals to share** and ensuring they feel safe and supported in expressing their experiences without fear of stigma or judgment.

STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING PEER VOICE

Organizations can take several strategic actions to integrate peer voice effectively:

- **Engaging peer representatives in leadership roles:** Hiring peers in leadership positions ensures their voices are heard at all levels of decision-making.
- **Including peer representation in governing bodies:** Actively including peers on boards, councils and leadership teams helps ensure their perspectives shape organizational policies. Encourage improved communication across the organization by providing opportunities to share perspectives and ideas across departments and disciplines.

- **Establishing peer support programs and networks:** Creating formal peer support programs allows peers to connect, share experiences and provide mutual support.
- **Incorporating peer input in policy and program development:** Actively involving peers in the creation of policies and programs ensures these initiatives are grounded in real-world experience. This should include regular opportunities for feedback and consistent organizational follow-up.
- **Providing multiple pathways for peer input:** This can include formal leadership groups but should also consider options such as town hall meetings, suggestion boxes and digital communication platforms.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Incorporating peer voice presents challenges such as resistance from other staff, power imbalances and issues with confidentiality. Strategies to overcome these challenges include gradually introducing peer-centric practices, implementing clear communication, fostering a welcoming and respectful environment and setting clear objectives for peer involvement.

It's essential to address the following:

- **Skepticism and resistance to peer voice:** Overcome doubts about the efficacy of peer input by demonstrating its impact and value in decision-making. Take a gradual approach that emphasizes education about peer voice and highlights its positive impact on collaboration and innovation.
- **Power imbalances:** Mitigate potential power dynamics between peers and other professionals, ensuring an environment of respect and fairness. This can include team-building activities to encourage open dialogue and address potential trust issues.
- **Moving from a “seat at the table” to a “voice in the Conversation”:** Ensure that peers are not just present but actively engaged in decision-making processes. Leaders can support this by clearly defining the objectives for incorporating peer voice into decision-making, and by outlining how this practice aligns with the organization's mission, vision and values.
- **Ensuring confidentiality and privacy:** When peers share personal experiences, it's vital to safeguard confidentiality and maintain trust.

Reflection Questions

In which of the following areas has your organization incorporated peer voice?

- Leadership roles
- Governing body
- Committee membership
- Peer programs/network
- Policy/program development

What challenges has your organization experienced in incorporating peer voice in decision-making?

IMPACT AND OUTCOMES

Integrating peer voice offers numerous benefits:

- **Improved decision-making:** Including various perspectives leads to more well-rounded, informed decisions. This reduces the likelihood of overlooking critical factors and introduces new ideas and approaches that can contribute to the organization's growth and competitiveness.
- **Improved organizational culture:** Including peers raises employee satisfaction and morale, creating a more collaborative work environment. This leads to higher levels of engagement, productivity and retention.
- **Increased program relevance:** Programs that incorporate peer input are more effective and aligned with the needs of people receiving services because they reflect a broader range of perspectives.
- **Increased trust and community engagement:** Peer involvement enhances trust within the community, encouraging deeper engagement and participation.



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY: *Impact Assessment Design*

- Draft a plan for measuring the impact of peer voice integration.
- Focus on both qualitative and quantitative metrics.
- Consider topics such as participant outcomes, innovation, impact on organizational culture and alignment with organizational mission.

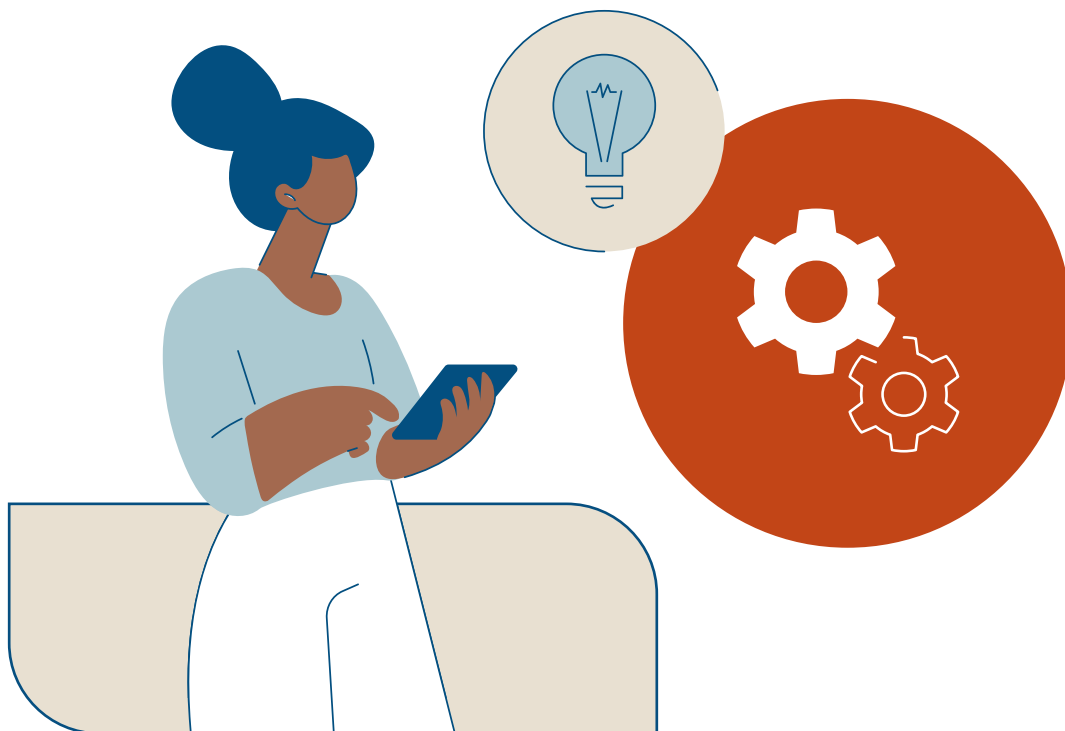
KEY RESOURCES

- **[Establishing Strong Peer Support Programs and Practices in CCBHCs — Session Four Recording](#)**
- **[Living Experience Advisory Council Recommendations Report](#):** The National Council's CCBHC Living Experience Advisory Council's recommendations on best and promising practices to center lived/living experience and recovery in practice, operations and governance.
- **[Peer Certification Standards](#):** SAMHSA's National Model Standards for Peer Certification, which are designed to establish consistent and high-quality benchmarks for the certification of peer support workers across the United States. These standards aim to ensure that peer support workers are well-equipped with the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary to effectively support individuals on their recovery journeys.

Additional Resources

The following resources offer valuable insights and practical guidance to further support the development and implementation of peer support programs within CCBHCs:

- **Alliance for Rights and Recovery:** A leading advocacy organization committed to advancing the rights, recovery, and full community inclusion of people with psychiatric disabilities, offering policy resources, training, and advocacy tools grounded in peer values and self-determination
- **Intentional Peer Support:** Intentional Peer Support (IPS) is a transformative approach that emphasizes relationships and mutual learning. IPS moves beyond traditional service models to create environments where both peers and those they support can thrive.
 - **IPS Core Competencies Self-assessment Tool:** This scale outlines the competencies essential for practicing IPS, emphasizing skills in building transformative relationships, understanding power dynamics and fostering mutual respect.
 - **IPS Core Competencies Scale**
 - **3 Steps to Practice IPS**
- **Pat Deegan:** A leading figure in the mental health recovery movement, Deegan offers innovative perspectives on peer support and recovery. Her work emphasizes the importance of empowerment and the disruptive potential of peer-driven services.
- **Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery:** The Copeland Center offers a wealth of resources on wellness and recovery, including tools for implementing Wellness Recovery Action Plans and other peer support strategies.



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