

Many Pathways to Recovery

■ Background

Every person in recovery from an addiction has a unique story about their path to recovery and the twists and turns that that path has taken. Recovery pathways are highly personalized, building on the strengths, talents, coping abilities, and resources of each individual. Peer support services include diverse strategies to support people who are trying to access and sustain their recovery. This tool is designed to help peer-driven service programs adopt an approach that accepts and supports many paths to recovery in order to reach more people with recovery supports, enhance services, and reduce stigma.

“There are many pathways of long-term recovery, and all are cause for celebration.”

—William White

■ Why Is This Important for Peer Recovery Support Services?

A number of key leaders have worked toward creating a definition for addiction recovery and focused on three essential elements:*

- The resolution of drug-related problems (most often measured in terms of sobriety, abstinence, or diagnostic remission),
- Improvement in overall health, and
- Positive community reintegration and/or engagement.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) defines addictions recovery as abstinence from the use of alcohol, illicit drugs, and **nonprescribed medications**, which means that people who are prescribed medication-assisted therapies (e.g., methadone) and/or medications to treat mental illness can also be in recovery. These definitions all support a broad understanding of recovery and the diversity of means to achieve and sustain it.

Recovery is nonlinear, characterized by continual growth and improved functioning that may involve setbacks. Setbacks are a natural, though not inevitable, part of the recovery process, so it is essential to foster resilience in all recovering individuals and families.** Individuals have unique needs, strengths, preferences, goals, cultures, and backgrounds— including trauma experience — that affect their pathways to recovery. When peer leaders, recovery coaches, and entire organizations recognize and affirm those unique aspects, they are better able to deliver support for people to initiate or maintain recovery and enhance the quality of life of peers in long-term recovery.

* Adapted from Recovery-Oriented Methadone Maintenance by William L. White, MA and Lisa Mojer-Torres, JD

** Adapted from SAMHSA's Working Definition of Recovery

*** Twelve Step Facilitation Therapy. SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices.

Different Pathways to Recovery

Recovery encompasses an individual's whole life, including mind, body, spirit, and community. People can recover individually, with family, or in their communities. The following list is not exhaustive but highlights some common pathways to recovery that may even be combined:

Peer recovery support services: nonclinical, peer-led services such as recovery coaching and peer-led support groups

Faith-based support: approaches grounded in a religion or faith tradition

Medication-assisted recovery: recovery supported by prescription medication such as methadone or buprenorphine

Managed use model: strategies to help individuals manage their drug use to minimize harmful consequences (e.g., overdose, sexually transmitted infections)

Inpatient treatment: residential programs that include medical, therapeutic, and social supports

Mutual-aid societies: secular groups often formed around gender identity (e.g., women, LGBTQ) or a common social experience

Culturally specific paths to recovery: recovery shaped by culturally defined practices such as the Native American Wellbriety Movement

Mental health services: services such as psychotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy

Natural change: ceasing drug or alcohol use on one's own, often with support from friends and/or family

Social clubs or clubhouses: recovery community centers (12-step and non-12-step) that combine social club activities and recovery services

12-step programs: Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and other groups that follow a "brief, structured, and manual-driven"*** approach based on fellowship and finding sobriety through a higher power and are self-supporting, independent, and not aligned with outside entities or organizations

Internet-based recovery support: recovery support activities that originate from and are based online

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Steps for Integrating Many Pathways into Peer Programs

1 TALK: Begin with a peer-led dialogue about the definition of recovery.

Facilitating Questions/Activities: What does recovery mean for you? What do you need to help sustain recovery every day?

2 EDUCATE: Provide basic training and education about the process and stages of recovery and medication-assisted treatments.

Facilitating Questions/Activities: Ask peers in medication-assisted recovery to lead a group or facilitate staff training. Visit other recovery organizations with different cultural, social, or religious orientations from your own.

3 ASSESS: Hold peer-led discussions to assess how well the organization's peer services support many pathways to recovery.

Facilitating Questions/Activities: Review your mission statement for language that supports or undermines many paths. Does your staff represent different paths to recovery? Does your marketing, branding, and physical space leave room for different views of recovery?

4 CREATE: Create solutions to address any gaps.

Facilitating Questions: How can you improve staffing and outreach to reflect many paths to recovery? What kind of education or training do you need?

Program Elements That Support Many Pathways

A Definition of Recovery: Create a definition for recovery that encompasses many pathways in your program manuals and peer leader manuals.

Recovery Planning: Develop an individual recovery plan for each peer whom you serve that builds on that person's recovery capital, goals, and hopes.

Ongoing Education and Discussion: Support well-informed and ongoing dialogue about many pathways to recovery with peer leaders and others accessing services. Have educational materials available for peers and peer leaders.

Stigma Reduction Work: Provide ways to discuss and address stigma against addicts, people in recovery, and people who use medication-assisted therapies.

Ongoing Support: Support those who supervise peer leaders with tools to facilitate discussions around many pathways to recovery.

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Peer Input: Hold focus groups with peers using medication-assisted therapies to identify barriers and facilitators to their recovery that exist both within your program and outside in the community at large.

Linkages and Partnerships: Collaborate with local [opioid treatment programs](#), mental health and health care providers, and culturally based social service programs.

■ Resources

- Recovery in Mental Health and Addiction. Larry Davidson, PhD, and William L. White, MA. A list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) about the relationship between mental health and addiction recovery. [http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/2010 Recovery in Mental Health and Addiction.pdf](http://www.williamwhitepapers.com/pr/2010%20Recovery%20in%20Mental%20Health%20and%20Addiction.pdf)
- What is Behavioral Health Recovery Management? A Brief Primer. William L. White, MA, Michael G. Boyle, MA, David L. Loveland, PhD, Patrick W. Corrington, PsyD.

The basics of recovery management and the role of many pathways.
http://www.bhrm.org/papers/BHRM_primer.pdf
- Pathways to Healing and Recovery. SAMHSA Partners for Recovery. An exploration of different recovery approaches and pathways detailed in peer focus groups and interviews. http://partnersforrecovery.samhsa.gov/docs/Recovery_Pathways_Report.pdf

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