FACES & VOICES
OF RECOVERY

ADVOCATE. ACT. ADVANCE.

Dispatch from the Front:

Lessons Learned at the Collision of Public Health, Peer Support, and a Rising Tide of Hope

9/18/2025

Evaluation

Certificate of Completion

Interactive = Enjoyable experience

Use cameras whenever possible

Participate

- Open-mindedness

- Respect

- Encouragement

- "Ouch"

- "Stretch"

- Confidentiality

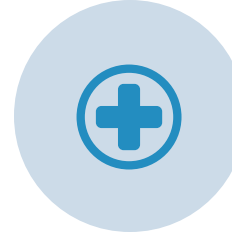- What else?

Identify various global approaches to substance use disorder and recovery supportive services

Describe the role of leadership in public health and recovery support settings

Distinguish leadership roles in public health and peer support implementation

Describe the value of integrating peer support into public health systems

Identify key lessons learned from real-world examples at the intersection of public health and peer support

Explain how hope can be operationalized as a strategic component of recovery and resilience

SAMHSA's Definition of Recovery: SAMHSA defines recovery as a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. This definition is not limited to a single point in time but rather describes an ongoing process.

https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-use/recovery

A Universal Definition: Despite growing consensus on the importance of a holistic approach, a universally agreed-upon definition of recovery, especially operationalizing it, remains a challenge

UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime): Works with the WHO. UNODC supports Member States in enhancing the quality of drug use disorder treatment services and systems, *including incorporating peer suppor*t, based on international standards.

https://www.unodc.org/unodc/index.html

NAPS (National Association of Peer Supporters): Is dedicated to *promoting and supporting peer support* in behavioral health systems. This organization is now defunct.

https://www.peersupportworks.org/

SAMHSA's work includes promoting evidence-based practices, fostering recovery-oriented systems of care, and *advocating for the inclusion of recovery supports in various settings*, including healthcare, courts, and correctional facilities.

https://www.samhsa.gov/

Global and Public Health Approaches: Recovery Supports

A global approach to addiction recovery involves recognizing the complexity of addiction. This approach embraces a public health perspective, implements evidence-based interventions tailored to diverse cultural contexts, and fosters supportive recovery environments. Addressing treatment access barriers and promoting integrated, person-centered care can help more individuals achieve and maintain long-term recovery.

The public health approach views addiction as a health issue, rather than solely a criminal justice matter, and focuses on prevention, harm reduction, and disease management.

- Peer Worker Lived Experience: Direct, Indirect, Hybrid

- Training: Basic, Specialized, Continuous Education, Formal Education and certification Types

- Support Approach: Peer worker-delivered self-help, Peer worker-run services, Peer worker partnerships, Peer worker-led advocacy

- Support Settings: Community-Based, Clinical, Justice System

- Support Activities: Emotional, Informational, Instrumental, Affiliational

- Recovery Milestones: Proximal, Distal

https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1529078/full

- Broadening access to Naloxone
- Supporting the use of medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) and Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT)
- Improving treatment and recovery supports in jails and prisons
- Expanding prevention strategies
- Expanding harm reduction services
- Reducing misuse of opioids
- Enhancing data collection and research

Medications play a crucial role in treating both opioid use disorder (OUD) and alcohol use disorder (AUD), as well as in reversing opioid overdoses.

- For OUD, FDA-approved medications like methadone, buprenorphine, and naltrexone are used to reduce cravings and the euphoric effects of opioids.

- For AUD, medications like disulfiram, acamprosate, and naltrexone are used to reduce alcohol consumption and cravings.

- In the case of opioid overdose, naloxone is a life-saving medication that can reverse the effects of opioids.

Global and Public Health Approaches: Opioid Abatement Efforts

Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) and Opioid Agonist Treatment (OAT):
• In Europe, OAT is often integrated with low-threshold drug counseling for high-risk opioid use, leading to high retention rates in care.
• Countries like Switzerland, Austria, and Germany provide easily accessible and free OAT.
• The Maldives offers free methadone maintenance treatment through a government clinic, though the number of slots is limited.

Overdose Reversal:
Australia has rescheduled naloxone, allowing it to be available in pharmacies without a prescription.
• The Czech Republic, Germany, France, Italy, and Norway also have programs to increase naloxone availability, while Ireland is piloting similar initiatives.
• Some libraries in the United States have started providing naloxone in wall-mounted boxes.

Substance Use Disorder (SUD) recovery programs are evolving to better serve young people, recognizing their unique needs and developmental stage. While recent data show some positive trends in overall youth substance use, there's a concerning rise in overdose deaths among adolescents, particularly involving fentanyl. These trends highlight the importance of adapting SUD recovery approaches to effectively engage and support youth.

- Alternative Peer Groups (APGs)
- Recovery High Schools
- Collegiate Recovery Programs/Communities
- Young People in Recovery (YPR)

Global and Public Health Approaches: Youth Supports

UNODC Youth Initiative aims to connect young people from around the globe and empower them to become active in their schools, communities, and youth groups for substance use prevention and health promotion. It provides a platform for youth to share their experiences, ideas, and creativity, and to get support for creating their own substance use prevention and health promotion activities. Activities include the Youth Forum, DAPC Grants, and Friends in Focus. (https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/youth-initiative.html)

Sweden, Norway, and some European Countries: Utilize interventions like the Cannabis Cessation Program (CCP), the Motivation to Change Inventory for Adolescents (adapted for Icelandic context), and the Norwegian multisystemic therapy program (MST).

Developing Countries (e.g., Ukraine, Philippines, Nigeria, Peru): Are working to develop addiction public health infrastructure with support from organizations like the UNODC, focusing on regulatory changes, workforce development, and resource allocation, according to the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Parity refers to the efforts to ensure health care coverage for substance use disorders and mental health conditions is equivalent to the coverage provided for medical conditions and surgical procedures.

The history of substance use and alcohol use parity in the United States involves a shift from treating addiction primarily as a moral or criminal issue to recognizing it as a medical condition deserving of comparable health insurance coverage as other medical conditions.

Substance and alcohol use are increasingly being acknowledged as a public health crisis leading to illness, injury, death, and social and economic disruption.

Systems to minimize parity issues: single-payer healthcare systems

Integrated care models: integrating mental health and SUD services into primary care settings

Cost elimination: elimination or reduction of co-pays

Workforce development: peer and lay health workers to address shortages of psychiatrists and psychologists

Social determinants of health: use of social policies

Harm reduction and treatment innovations: harm reduction centers, supervised injection sites, and comprehensive support networks

In essence, international efforts are moving towards a more holistic and person-centered understanding of recovery, recognizing that it encompasses a wide range of individual, social, and economic factors.

International organizations play a vital role in promoting evidence-based practices, providing technical assistance, and advocating for policies that support individuals in achieving and maintaining recovery.

Public health leadership plays a critical role in fostering and integrating peer support programs, which have demonstrated effectiveness in improving health outcomes, particularly in mental health and chronic disease management. Here are some key lessons learned regarding leadership and peer support in public health

- Creating a vision and championing peer support
- Building a supportive culture
- Providing resources and training
- Establishing clear policies and procedures
- Facilitating integration and collaboration
- Evaluating and adapting programs

Acknowledge and address power dynamics

Provide adequate supervision

Clarify roles and responsibilities

Address stigma and discrimination

Support peer specialist self-care

Integrating Peer Support Into Public Health Systems

Peer supporters bring lived experience, which fosters authentic connection and trust with individuals who may be wary of traditional health systems.

This trust leads to higher engagement, especially among marginalized or underserved populations.

Example: people with substance use disorders are more likely to engage in treatment when approached by someone who has walked a similar path.

Peer support has been shown to improve outcomes in areas like mental health, chronic disease management, HIV prevention, and maternal health.

It supports self-management, medication adherence, and emotional resilience.

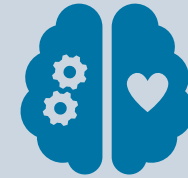Example: in diabetes care, peer-led interventions have led to better glycemic control and reduced depressive symptoms.

Peer support normalizes conversations around mental health, addiction, trauma, and recovery.

It helps reduce stigma and challenge discriminatory practices within health systems.

Example: youth-led mental health programs in Kenya have shifted cultural attitudes and increased help-seeking behavior.

Strengthens Community-Based Care

Peer support is inherently community-centered, making it ideal for decentralized public health models.
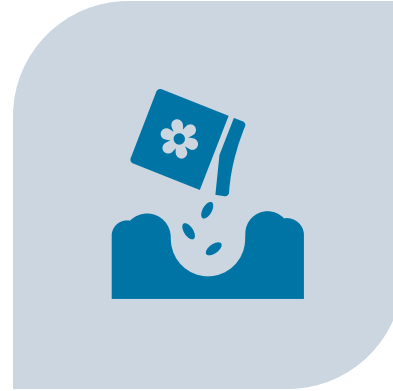
It complements clinical care with social and emotional support, often in low-resource settings.

Example: in humanitarian contexts, peer networks help maintain continuity of care for noncommunicable diseases.

Cost-Effective and Scalable
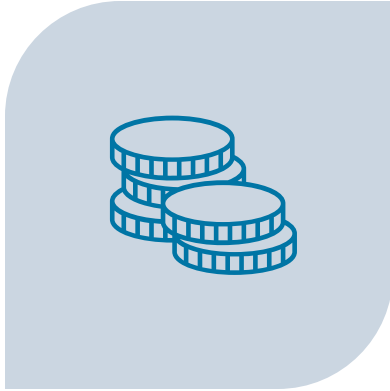
Peer support programs are cost-effective, especially when compared to traditional clinical interventions.

They are scalable across diverse settings — from prisons to schools to refugee camps.

Example: group counseling led by peers in Kenyan schools boosted coping skills by 50% at significantly lower cost.

Catalyzes Systemic Change

When integrated into public health systems, peer support can reshape service delivery, inform policy, and drive innovation.

It brings a humanizing lens to health care, emphasizing dignity, hope, and lived wisdom.

Example: Scotland's prison recovery coaches are influencing national harm reduction strategies.

Leadership in Action

Impact Highlights:

- Over 200 prison residents trained across five prisons.

- Programs include trauma-informed recovery, emotional intelligence, and employability skills.

- Cultural change observed among prison staff and residents.

Leadership in Public Health and Recovery Support

- Creating a vision and championing peer support

- Building a supportive culture

- Providing resources and training

Community Justice Scotland
https://communityjustice.scot/blogs/why-we-need-peer-led-recovery-projects-in-scottish-prisons/

Impact Highlights:

- Over 20,000 individuals reached across 47 counties.

- Peer-led school programs prevent up to 30% of future mental health issues.

- Group counseling boosts coping skills by 50% at significantly lower cost.

Leadership in Public Health and Recovery Support

- Creating a vision and championing peer support

- Building a supportive culture

- Facilitating integration and collaboration

Mental Health and Wellness Kenya https://mentalhealth.co.ke/

Impact:

- 40% reduction in emergency room visits for behavioral health crises.

- Increased trust in public health services among marginalized populations.

- Peer responders reported higher engagement and follow-up rates than traditional responders.

Leadership in Public Health and Recovery Support

- Building a supportive culture

- Providing resources and training

- Facilitating integration and collaboration

Impact:

- Builds trust and legitimacy

- Drives policy and system change

- Fosters innovation and adaptability

- Promotes workforce development and equity

- Sustains hope and culture change

Leadership in Public Health and Recovery Support

- Establishing clear policies and procedures

- Evaluating and adapting programs

Lessons Learned

Public Health Perspective

Public health systems are learning that peer support isn't just complementary, it's catalytic. It builds trust, bridges gaps, and brings cultural humility into clinical spaces.

Peer Support Perspective

Peer workers are not just service providers; they're system disruptors. They bring authenticity, accountability, and a different kind of data - lived truth.

Hope as Strategy

Hope is not soft. It's strategic, IT drives engagement, reduces stigma, and sustains recovery. We're seeing programs now that measure hope and use it as a leading indicator of success.

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Thank you for attending!

www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org

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