

**Peers as Valued Workers: A Massachusetts Roadmap for Successfully
Integrating Peer Specialists and Peer Support Workers into the Public Mental
Health System**

Executive Summary

***“The hope and the opportunity to regain control of their lives- often vital to recovery- will become real for consumers and families. Consumers will play a significant role in shifting the current system to a recovery-oriented one by participating in planning, evaluation, research, training, and service delivery.”
Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America***

Transcom’s Vision for Successful Integration of Peer Workers¹:

We envision a system where people in recovery have guaranteed access to certified peer specialists and peer support workers throughout Massachusetts, whether through an agency where they receive services, from a Recovery Learning Community or from another peer operated program. Peer Specialists and Peer Support Workers will serve as critical role models for their peers and colleagues that recovery is possible and achievable. Their unique roles and job functions will be understood and valued by their peers, their colleagues and supervisors. They will be equitably reimbursed and supported in their primary focus of advocating for the consumers they work with.

Inspired by the vision and recommendations of the President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, people in recovery are taking an active role in Massachusetts to transform its public mental health system. One critical element in this transformative work is people in recovery working as peer specialists and peer support workers in traditional provider agencies and consumer operated organizations.

As traditional mental health providers begin to see the value and importance of these roles in their own programs, the demand is increasing for certified peer specialists and peer support workers. With this increasing demand comes the need to develop infrastructure and supports that will ensure the success and sustainability of these roles over time.

Responding to this need, the Transformation Committee (Transcom), a state level partnership of people in recovery, provider agencies, stage agencies, and other advocates, is committed to achieving the successful integration of peer specialists and peer support workers throughout the public mental health system. Transcom charged a subcommittee to develop a roadmap for achieving successful integration of peer specialists and peer support workers throughout the state’s public mental health system.

The purpose of this roadmap is to offer policy recommendations to the Department of Mental Health on how to successfully integrate peer specialist and peer support services throughout state’s public mental health system.

¹ The term peer workers refers to both certified peer specialists and peer support workers when recommendations apply to both of these types of individuals.

Transcom members are excited to provide this roadmap to the leaders of the Department of Mental Health, and look forward to collaborating on achieving its vision. The roadmap begins with defining a vision for the successful integration of peer workers. It then sets out short and long-term objectives in eight domains that are critical for achieving the vision. Each domain section also includes a brief description of its purpose or why addressing the domain is crucial for success.

Domain 1: Define Roles and Functions of Certified Peer Specialists and Peer Support Workers

The roles and functions of certified peer specialists and peer support workers are seen as valuable and essential to the work of the state's public mental health system.

Short Term Objectives:

1. Standard definitions of PSW and CPS are in effect across the public mental health system and other state health and human service agencies.
2. DMH encourages providers to incorporate these roles into their organizations.
3. DMH increases their own employment of peer workers throughout their programs.

Long Term Objectives:

1. DMH requires providers to incorporate these services into their organizations.
2. CPS and PSW are adequately funded and available in all service types.

Domain 2: Articulate the Value of Certification for Peer Specialists

A specialized workforce of Certified Peer Specialists exists to offer education, advocacy and support to their peers.

Short Term Objectives:

1. DMH continues to fund peer specialist trainings.

2. The peer specialist training and certification program is evaluated for continuous improvement opportunities.
3. Certified peer specialists are reimbursed at a level equal to other similarly qualified professionals in their organizations.

Long Term Objectives:

1. Other sources of funding are secured to support additional peer specialist trainings (e.g. providers and other state agencies fund slots for their clients).
2. Community colleges recognize the value of peer specialist training and certification and offer credit towards a degree for those who successfully complete the training and certification program.
3. Additional tracks for specialized training (e.g. documentation and paperwork, employment, benefits, housing, trauma-informed care, etc.) and advanced certification are developed.

Domain 3: Provide Training and Continuing Education for Peer Workers

Peer Specialists and Peer Support Workers are able to continuously develop new skills and expertise that have a foundation in their lived experience of recovery.

Short Term Objectives:

1. Opportunities for peer specialist and peer support worker continuing education are funded by DMH and providers.

2. The Transformation Center articulates and monitors continuing education requirements for certified peer specialists.

Long Term Objective:

1. Specialized training and continuing education in areas such as housing, benefits, employment, and trauma-informed care are available to further develop the skills of peer specialists and peer support workers.

Domain 4: Fund Peer Specialists and Peer Support Workers Appropriately

Peer services are so integral to the system's success that every funding stream includes dedicated dollars for peer services.

Short Term Objectives:

1. Working with Medicaid and other state agencies, DMH investigates all avenues for additional funding of peer services.
2. Demonstration projects integrating peers are established and evaluated for their effectiveness.

Long Term Objectives:

1. Lessons learned from demonstration projects are shared with the provider community to assist them with integrating peer workers.
2. The increased integration of peer workers is reflected in program and budget restructuring.
3. Medicaid financing is implemented for funding peer specialist services.
4. All funding approaches emphasize the importance of employing more than one peer worker within mental health programs, especially intensive settings such as inpatient units and PACT teams.

Domain 5: Train and Educate the Provider Community on Integrating Peer Roles

DMH leads sustained educational & training opportunities for the mental health workforce to assure that peer workers are treated as and considered colleagues of value.

Short Term Objectives:

1. DMH articulates a vision for how recovery oriented principles and peer specialists/peer support workers are to be integrated in provider settings.
2. A statewide committee of diverse membership convenes to develop a curriculum for providers on integrating peer workers into their agencies.
3. Knowledge of people in recovery informs the content and structure of training and education opportunities.

Long Term Objective:

1. The Transformation Center, in collaboration with Recovery Learning Communities, are funded to coordinate and provide training and education to the provider community and DMH on how to best integrate peer workers.

Domain 6: Offer Technical Assistance to Providers on Workplace Issues

Mental Health provider agencies are exemplary employers of people with lived experience.

Short Term Objectives:

1. Mental health providers develop networks to share best practices and lessons learned in successfully employing peer workers.
2. Transformation Center develops and makes available practical resources to providers to assist them with personnel issues.

Long Term Objective:

1. The satisfaction, success, and well-being of people employed as peer specialists and peer support workers significantly increases.

Domain 7: Promote and Facilitate Organizational and Cultural Changes Across Mental Health System

Policies and procedures support and enhance strengths-based services by peer and non-peer professionals in a culture where all are respected for their unique role in the partnership. All people's lived experience is sought and valued in a safe and supportive environment.

Short Term Objectives:

1. Agencies are familiar with Transcom's statement "Promoting a Culture of Respect" and adopt its vision by strengthening practices that support dialogue and self-evaluation.
2. DMH creates a task force to review policies and regulations to ensure that they are in alignment with recovery oriented practices

Long Term Objective:

1. DMH makes every effort to change policies and regulations that pose barriers to recovery-oriented practices and successful peer integration.

Domain 8: Conduct Research and Evaluation to Maximize Success

Maximize the effectiveness of peer workers through research and evaluation initiatives conducted by a partnership of consumer researchers, academic institutions, and the Department of Mental Health.

Short Term Objectives:

1. Conduct pre/post evaluations of trainings related to integrating peer specialists or peer support workers into the workforce (e.g., peer specialist trainings, provider trainings, etc) with follow-up assessment to determine whether gains are sustained over the long term
2. Conduct additional qualitative work on how certain mental health programs have achieved successful integration of peer specialists and/or peer support workers
3. Build the capacity of consumer run organizations to evaluate their own services and activities.

Long Term Objective:

1. Conduct a major implementation study exploring the process and outcomes of how peer workers are integrated throughout Massachusetts using a longitudinal design.

Next Steps

The responsibility of successfully integrating peer workers belongs to all individuals and organizations. Transcom is eager to partner with DMH to explore the operationalization of this roadmap.

Some next steps may include:

- Convene diverse stakeholder groups to discuss how to implement roadmap objectives
- Develop subcommittee(s) to begin implementing roadmap objectives
- Consider how to use the upcoming DMH procurement to achieve short term objectives
- Collaborate with MassHealth on exploring financing mechanisms for Peer Specialist services