

Peer support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities



By sharing their own lived experience and practical guidance, peer mentors help people to develop their own goals, create strategies for self-determination and take concrete steps toward building fulfilling, self-determined lives for themselves. As a recognized leader in peer support services within behavioral health, Optum is working to promote the development and deployment of peer programs to support individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD).

The opportunity: Expand peer support services to individuals with I/DD

Currently, 39 state Medicaid plans reimburse peer support services for individuals with mental illness and/or substance use disorder.¹ Optum has established behavioral health peer support services in 24 states, where peers are either our employees or employees of our contracted providers.

Although Medicaid-funded peer mentor programs are prevalent and successful within behavioral health, few states have benefits and formal certification programs for paid peer support for individuals with I/DD. Existing programs are often supported by local state developmental disability councils or grants. Ongoing funding and sustainability of the program can be an issue.

Where peer mentors can make a difference

Peer support services in behavioral health are considered evidence-based by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Research shows that when supported by peer mentors, individuals show increased self-esteem and confidence, increased sense of control and ability to bring about changes in their lives and reduced acute inpatient admissions, length of stay and cost.^{2,3,4,5,6}



The Optum approach

Self-determination and inclusion

Empower individuals with I/DD to achieve their goals for employment, community engagement and inclusion

Commitment and support

Provide support for families, caregivers, advocates and providers

Strength and service

Strengthen programs and systems that serve and support individuals with I/DD

The National Core Indicators outlines opportunities where peers can support individuals with I/DD, for example⁷:

- Only 20.2% of individuals with I/DD engage in paid employment in the community.
- 58% of individuals chose or had input on where they live (if not living in family home).
- 48% of individuals want help to make or stay connected with friends.

Not only can peers support others to obtain meaningful employment, but peer mentoring itself can be a meaningful career.

Peer mentors:

- Inspire hope that people can live in the community successfully
- Walk with people on their journeys to explore their community and how to make connections such as find jobs, make friends, get health care and more
- Dispel myths about what it means to have a disability
- Provide self-help education and link people to tools and resources
- Support people in identifying their goals, hopes and dreams, and creating a roadmap for getting there

The support of peers can enhance the ability to leverage and maximize what is available in the community. The mentality of wrapping services around a person can transform into a more normal, inclusive life that can positively impact an individual's overall outcomes and quality of life.

Peer mentor training curriculum for individuals with I/DD

Developed and piloted with participation and input from individuals with I/DD, the Optum peer mentor training program includes topics such as:

- The role of the peer mentor
- Self-determination and self-advocacy
- Conflict resolution
- Abuse, bullying and neglect
- Ethics and etiquette
- Supporting people's choices
- The Americans with Disabilities Act
- Mental health and substance use

The training program is modular in format and can be delivered in person or virtually. It was designed for organizations that want to develop peer programs and employ peer mentors.



Key features

Peer mentor training curriculum for individuals with I/DD

- Trainer and student guides
- Modular, in-person or virtual training format
- Engaging, in-class roleplay, discussion topics and out-of-class activities
- Pre- and post-testing to support certification requirements

Supervisor best practices

- Resources for peer supervisors

State certification

- Review and adaptation to state certification requirements

Partnerships

- Partnership with national and local key organizations to develop and pilot new and innovative peer programs

Outcomes

- Ongoing curriculum improvement
- Program evaluation

What can we do together?

Optum is committed to advocating for sustainable and successful peer mentor programs and employment opportunities for individuals with I/DD. We welcome opportunities to share tools, best practices and lessons learned, to expand the evidence base of the positive impact of peer mentor programs for people with I/DD and to work with stakeholders on program development.

About Optum

With many years of service to the I/DD community, Optum solutions are based on our strengths and relationships. Through support that ensures community inclusion and independence, we partner across programs and systems to tackle the challenges facing people with I/DD and families every day. We understand the most complex populations, including 34 million individuals who access Optum Behavioral Health resources nationwide. Optum has brought innovation to the work of peer support by utilizing best practices, identifying evidence-based research and, most importantly, listening to and learning from the peer community.

Sources

1. Open Minds. Does peer support pay? openminds.com/market-intelligence/executive-briefings/does-peer-support-pay. March 14, 2018. Accessed September 14, 2021.
2. Davidson L, Chinman M, Kloos B, Weingarten R, Stayner D, Tebes J. Peer support among individuals with severe mental illness: A review of the evidence. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*. 1999; 6(2):165–187.
3. Salzer MS. Consumer-delivered services as a best practice in mental health care delivery and the development of practice guidelines: mental health association of southeastern Pennsylvania best practices team Philadelphia. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Skills*. 2002; 6(3):355–382.
4. Davidson L, Bellamy C, Guy K, Miller R. Peer support among persons with severe mental illnesses: a review of evidence and experience. *World Psychiatry*. 2012; 11(2):123–128.
5. Results from an Optum February 2018 analysis of 16 Michigan Medicaid beneficiaries who successfully completed the Optum peer support program between January 1, 2016 and January 31, 2017.
6. Results from an Optum November 2019 analysis of 107 Texas Medicaid beneficiaries who enrolled in Optum peer support services between January 1, 2016 and December 31, 2018.
7. September 2018 NCI Data Brief; 2018–2019 NCI In-Person Survey; 2019–2020 NCI Family/Guardian Survey.



Partner to serve

Supporting the I/DD community through:

- Service coordination
- Peer support training and services
- Behavioral health services
- Physical health
- Other services and resources

Supporting state programs by:

- Coordinating fragmented delivery systems
- Managing program costs
- Increasing access to services
- Supporting life transitions, such as child to adult, independent living, employment and aging parents
- Improving community inclusion and life satisfaction
- Seeking the highest quality services and supports

Contact us to learn more about our I/DD solutions.

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