

**2012 Update:
Status of the Developing Mental Health Peer Workforce in Massachusetts**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this paper, Transcom* provides context and recommendations to inspire commitment and confidence in those who want to successfully integrate mental health peer specialists into the workforce. Transcom is calling for a unified, system-wide, focused and sustained effort to strengthen and protect the integrity of the peer worker role and the success of professional Certified Peer Specialists (CPSs). Massachusetts has brought innovative and courageous leadership to countless social, health and civil rights challenges that affect society. With timely action, the integration of peer specialists can also become an economic, social justice and quality of life victory for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Information that inspires commitment includes:

- Certified peer specialists are skilled members of an emerging profession that is recognized throughout the country and internationally.
- Peer specialists offer unique and effective support for people using mental health services for a number of reasons, including: (1) the role itself conveys hope, authenticity and trustworthiness and (2) peer specialists have skills that inform and complement the work of other mental health professionals.
- Since 2002, Peer Specialists have paved the way and have been successful change agents in a variety of roles, including PACT Peer Recovery Specialists, hospital-based seclusion and restraint de-briefers and Recovery Learning Community (RLC) members.
- CPSs continue to offer vital support and contributions throughout the state mental health system and are pioneering the role in established, new, and emerging services.

Research finds that:

- (1) A poor understanding of the value and intent of the peer specialist role hinders the integration of peer specialists.
- (2) It is important to foster flexibility and collaboration from all levels of the organization to implement this new role. Peer Specialists must not work in isolation from each other or be marginalized from co-workers.
- (3) Proactive leadership, staff orientation, and training in advance of the new peer workforce helps people in the organization prepare for change.

* Transcom is made up of individuals who represent peer-operated services (including The Transformation Center and six Recovery Learning Communities), service providers, state agencies, and payers.

Recommendation 1:

Clarify and promote fidelity to Certified Peer Specialist standards and best practices through a web-based portal.

- Define CPS competencies, peer worker roles, and expectations for work places which employ peer specialists, and empower organizations to implement changes.
- Distribute tools and best practices through a web-based portal that is accessible to all.
- Unify support for peer support practices through education and exposure to recovery experiences.

Recommendation 2:

Ensure that every peer specialist interacts regularly with a CPS supervisor and peer colleagues.

- Create and expand opportunities for peer specialists to collaborate as professional educators, advocates, and agents of change.
- Ensure that lines of supervision serve to benefit people who use services and increase their access to community resources and supports.

Recommendation 3:

Build a broader continuum of peer specialist roles by establishing more entry-level peer worker positions and a CPS Continuing Education (CE) infrastructure.

- Develop a pre-certification, work-based training, and entry-level peer worker position to help individuals gain skills practice, supervision, and employment experience.
- Empower a Peer Specialist certifying organization to work with RLCs to establish a CE structure, develop standardized curriculum, and track the training and employment status of CPSs in Massachusetts.

Recommendation 4:

Allow for flexibility in the CPS training model while maintaining consistent standards for certification.

- Modify the CPS training and testing program to amplify essential competencies, accommodate diversity in learning styles and culture, and remain a reliable certification of CPS skills and knowledge.

Recommendation 5:

Promote “Universal Human Resource Design” with robust policies that maximize employment conditions for all employees.

- Encourage organizations to review their HR policies to ensure that hiring processes, the accrual and use of benefits, and reasonable accommodations are a good fit for all employees and the work goals of the organization.
- Support Human Resources staff to gain knowledge about a wide range of insurance and other resources related to employment success.

Recommendation 6:

Provide new financial resources to support the peer workforce.

- Pursue Medicaid funding for Certified Peer Specialist as a unique provider type, amend the State Mental Health Plan, and invest in the infrastructure required for reimbursement.
- Seek every opportunity to increase financial support for expanded access to mental health peer support.