


Initialium Health



NEW HAMPSHIRE  
**DHHS**  
DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Empowering New Hampshire's Peer Support Workforce: Strategies for Development and Integration

December 9, 2024

Initialium is a public benefit corporation committed to using innovation to improve human health.

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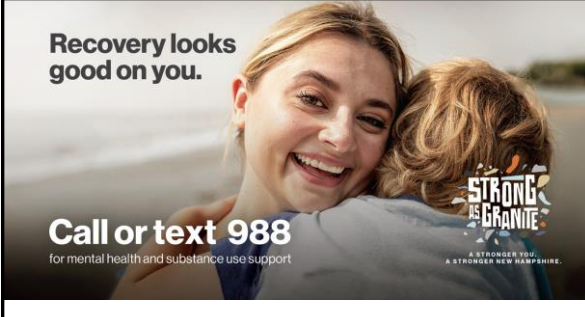
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**Recovery looks good on you.**

**Call or text 988**  
for mental health and substance use support

**STRONG AS GRANITE**  
A STRONGER YOU.  
A STRONGER NEW HAMPSHIRE.

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**Agenda**

- Welcome & Introductions
- Clinical Provider Orientation to Peer Support Services
- Fundamentals of Peer Support Training
- Statewide Survey Results
- Discussion: Potential Career Pathways

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## Workshop Objectives

- Describe the development and impact of a specialized orientation and training curriculum for New Hampshire's Peer Support workforce.
- Share relevant findings from comprehensive workforce surveys, highlighting key challenges and opportunities in Peer roles.
- Explore sustainable career pathways for Peer Support Specialists, enhancing retention and professional growth.

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## NH Peer Workforce Advancement History

### Origins in Advocacy

- Grassroots movement promoting recovery-oriented, person-centered care.
- Emphasis on empathy, connection, and empowerment.

### Certification & Training

- NH developed Certified Recovery Support Worker (CRSW) and Certified Peer Support Specialist (CPSS) certifications to set professional standards.
- Training addresses unique Peer needs, including language and minimizing labels.

### Policy & Organizational Support

- Evolving policies define flexible Peer roles.
- Waivers and regulations support Peer adaptability in mental health settings.

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## NH Peer Workforce Advancement History

The New Hampshire Peer Workforce Development plan focuses on expanding the Peer Support Workforce and integrating individuals with lived experience into mental health services through targeted efforts in training, recruitment, retention, and workplace culture.

- Develop a Peer Services Orientation for Clinical Providers
- Develop a concise Fundamentals of Peer Support Training for all new hires
- Conduct a Peer Support Specialist survey
- Conduct a Peer Support Specialist employer survey
- Establish a Lived Experience Career Ladder/Tree describing the current state and options for future optimization

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## Peer Services Orientation for Clinical Providers

### Goal

To equip community providers that employ Peers in their service array with an orientation on the values and practices of Peer Support.

### Approach

- Review of SAMHSA guidelines for supervision of Peer Support Specialists
- Peer Employers Focus Group with 27 participants
- Curated to NH Behavioral Health landscape.

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## Peer Services Orientation for Clinical Providers

**Module 1: Peer Support Specialist Roles & Responsibilities**  
Scope of services, SAMHSA definition, Peer roles in NH, and core competencies.

**Module 2: Evaluating and Preparing an Organization's Culture**  
Assessing organizational culture, language use, and clarifying Peer Support roles.

**Module 3: Integration of Peer Support Specialists**  
Recruitment, ethical hiring, onboarding, and retention strategies.

**Module 4: Effective Service Delivery**  
Integrating Peers into care teams, identifying champions of the role, and addressing role drift.

**Module 5: Supervising Peer Support Specialists**  
Supervisor roles, supervision methods, performance evaluation, and feedback techniques.



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## Fundamentals of Peer Support Training for New Hires

### Goal:

Prior to or within 60 days of beginning such employment, individuals who are new Peer Support Specialists and new Peer Supervisors receive standard online introductory training in the fundamentals of Peer Support in practice.

### Approach:

- SAMHSA Core Competencies
- NH CPSS Course, other state training programs (CA, PA)
- Focus Group: 19 Peers

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## Fundamentals of Peer Support Training for New Hires

### Module 1: Peer Support Roles & Responsibilities

### Module 2: Foundational Workplace Skills

Workplace expectations  
 Collaboration with mental health agencies  
 Conflict resolution strategies  
 Documentation best practices for Peer Support

### Module 3: Skill Development

Facilitating groups: managing discussions, setting boundaries, and encouraging mutual support  
 Self-care strategies: avoiding work stress at home

### Module 4: Mental Health & Recovery Models

Understanding symptoms and experiences without diagnosing  
 Role drift and influence of staff/clinicians

### Module 5: Crisis Intervention & De-escalation

Suicide prevention: how to ask about suicide directly




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## Peer Support Surveys

### Survey of Peer Support Specialists

- 44 complete responses
  - ~50% response rate from participating organizations
- Focused on tenure, wages, job satisfaction, career goals and outlook

### Survey of Employers

- 12 complete responses
- Focused on current and planned lived experience positions, vacancies, education requirements, and challenges with recruitment and retention

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## Peer Support Specialist - Demographics

Age Range	Gender	Race & Ethnicity
The majority of respondents were between the ages of 44-64 <b>15.9</b> Under 40 years old <b>11.7</b> 40-44 years old <b>29.7</b> 44-49 years old <b>25</b> 50-59 years old <b>28.2</b> 60-64 years old <b>6</b> 65 and older <b>6.8%</b>	The majority of respondents were female. <b>79.6%</b> Female <b>18.2</b> Male <b>0%</b> <b>2.3</b> Non-binary <b>0%</b>	The majority of respondents were white. <b>93.2</b> White <b>0%</b> <b>2.3</b> Native American <b>0%</b> <b>2.3</b> Two or more races <b>0%</b>

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### Peer Support Specialist - Experience



**50%** of respondents work in Peer Support Agencies

**18%** work in Community Mental Health Centers

**30%** of respondents work in other workplaces such as NAMI and other Non-Profits

**1** respondent works in a hospital



Most respondents have more than 1 year of experience as Peer Support Specialists

Most have been in their current position for 2-5 years (**36.4%**)

**31.8%** of respondents have been in the field for 1-3 years. **38.6%** have been in the field for over 5 years

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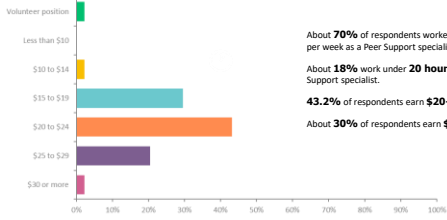
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### Peer Support Specialist – Salary & Hours



About **70%** of respondents worked **40+** hours per week as a Peer Support specialist.

About **18%** work under **20 hours** per week as a Peer Support specialist.

**43.2%** of respondents earn **\$20-\$24** per hour.

About **30%** of respondents earn **\$15-\$19** per hour.

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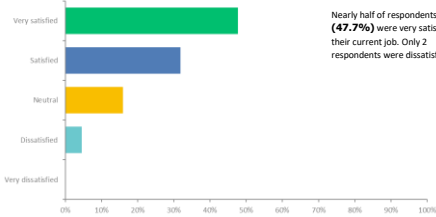
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### Job Satisfaction



Nearly half of respondents (**47.7%**) were very satisfied with their current job. Only 2 respondents were dissatisfied.

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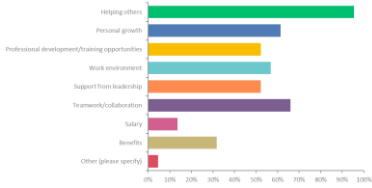
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## A Rewarding Career



Almost all respondents chose **"helping others"** as the most rewarding aspect of their career.

"With my lived experiences I am able to give another person hope, I am proof that things do get better as long as you get the appropriate help needed."

"I had to navigate the mental health system for my son by myself and never had any support along the way...now I get to help others navigate a system that's not always helpful, lending support and self-care tips to those that needed. It's very rewarding."

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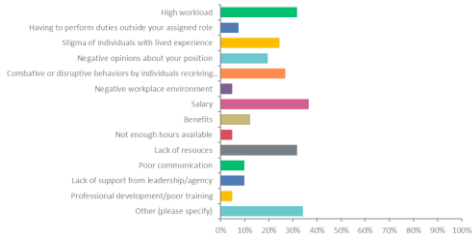
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## Career Challenges




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## Career Challenges: Workload

- Many respondents report feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work and pressure to meet billable hours, often requiring more than 40 hours of work per week
- Travel, documentation, and juggling various responsibilities contribute to high stress
- Some describe a lack of desk time between meetings, making it hard to balance their to-do lists and documentation
- Scheduling conflicts, cancellations, and the unpredictability of cases make it difficult to meet targets and manage personal life balance

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### Career Challenges: Salary

- Respondents feel their pay is very low, especially considering the emotional and challenging nature of the job
- Several mentioned that their pay is comparable to or lower than fast food jobs
- Some report that low wages make it difficult to support a family or make ends meet
- The lack of pay equity compared to other agencies and roles in the region is a recurring issue

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### Career Challenges: Lack of Resources

- A significant number of respondents highlight the scarcity of resources, both for themselves and the individuals they serve
- Respondents said that resources for children and adolescents, particularly for those aged 8–12, are described as inadequate
- Respondents note a lack of coordination between programs and difficulty accessing or explaining available resources to families
- The lack of necessary supplies, tools, and support from leadership exacerbates the challenges faced by Peer Support Specialists

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### Career Challenges: Stigma

- Some respondents feel looked down upon by mental health professionals due to their Peer role or lived experience
- There is a sense of judgment and stigma associated with having lived experience, with others questioning their education or qualifications
- Respondents express frustration with the way their role is perceived, both internally within organizations and externally in the broader mental health care system

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### Career Challenges: Combative Behaviors

- Respondents describe experiencing hostility, abusive language, and blame from families or caregivers who expect more than the Peer Support Specialist can provide
- They mention challenges in setting healthy boundaries and dealing with individuals who are not able to communicate clearly or are in distress




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### Career Outlook

Career Goals (next 1-3 years)	Outlook	Professional Development
<p>Most respondents hope to remain in their current position (47.7%) or advance in their current organization (43.2%).</p> <p>13.6% aim to move to a different organization and 38.6% aim to pursue further education. 20.5% aim to become a Peer Support Specialist.</p> <p>Only 4.6% respondents plan to change their career field.</p>	<p>The majority of respondents were optimistic about their career outlook</p> <p><b>43.2%</b> Very optimistic</p> <p><b>43.2%</b> Somewhat optimistic</p> <p><b>13.6%</b> Neutral</p>	<p>The majority of respondents said that continuing education (64%) or certification programs (51%) would be beneficial.</p> <p>46% of respondents want more networking opportunities.</p> <p>41% said they need better access to training programs.</p> <p>28% of respondents said they would benefit from mentorship programs and 23% believe that streamlining the certification process is needed.</p>

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### System Needs

#### Training Enhancements

- More real-life scenario-based training (e.g., domestic violence, sex trafficking, diverse backgrounds)
- Specific topics training (e.g., hearing voices, leadership, crisis)
- Smaller group training sessions and different formats to suit various learning styles
- Increased availability of Peer-specific training, especially for crisis work
- Retaking critical trainings (e.g., Wraparound, TRECC) after onboarding

#### Mentoring and Support

- Regular mentoring and professional development opportunities
- More experienced trainers with Peer Support expertise
- Increased supervisor and leadership understanding of the Peer role
- Emotional support and better case load management for work-life balance

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## System Needs, continued

### Financial Support

- Higher mileage reimbursement
- Improved pay, particularly switching to an hourly rate to make the role sustainable

### Work Flexibility

- More flexibility for Family Peer Support roles, allowing for balance between job demands and personal responsibilities

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## Key Takeaways

### Work Hours and Pay

- 70% work over 40 hours per week
- Pay is generally low, with many earning \$20-\$24 per hour, and some making less than \$20, comparable to fast food jobs

### Job Satisfaction and Challenges

- Helping others is the most rewarding aspect of the role
- Respondents feel overwhelmed by high workloads, travel, documentation, and the pressure to meet billable hours

### Resource Issues

- A lack of resources (especially for children and adolescents) are common frustrations.
- Inadequate support from leadership worsen these challenges

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## Key Takeaways, continued

### Career Aspirations

- Most respondents aim to stay in their current roles or advance within their organization. A smaller portion seeks further education or to become trainers

### Training and Support Needs

- Calls for more specialized, real-life scenario-based training, mentoring, and emotional support
- Improvements in financial support (e.g., higher pay and mileage reimbursement) and work-life flexibility are needed

### Stigma and Role Perception

- Some respondents feel looked down upon by professionals and face stigma due to their lived experience, leading to frustration with how their role is perceived

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## Employer Survey Results

12 responses, from the following participating organizations:

- H.E.A.R.T.S. Step Up/Step Down
- Stepping Stone & Next Step
- On the Road to Wellness
- One Peer to Another
- New Hampshire Hospital (NHH)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness New Hampshire (NAMI-NH)
- The Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester (MHCGM)

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## Education and Certification

Organization	Current Peers	CSRW	CPSS	Certification %
H.E.A.R.T.S. Step Up/Step Down	4	0	4	100%
Stepping Stone & Next Step	9	0	3	33%
On the Road to Wellness	25	0	23	92%
New Hampshire Hospital	1	0	1	100%
National Alliance on Mental Illness, NH*	31	5	12	55%
One Peer to Another*	7	3	3	86%
Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester	12	4	5	75%

The minimum education requirements for 70% of responding organizations was High School diploma or equivalent

The percentage of Peers with certification ranged from 33% to 100%. Most Peers were certified with the CPSS rather than CSRW

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## Planned Peer Support Positions

Organizational plans for growth:

- 42% of organizations plan to create additional lived experience positions in the next year
- 33% are unsure, citing factors like budget constraints, program expansion, and potential adjustments based on demand
- 25% of organizations do not plan to create new positions with the next year

Among organizations planning new roles:

- 56% do not plan to add any full-time positions
- 22% plan to create 1 to 2 full-time positions, while another 22% plan to create 3 to 5

For part-time roles:

- 56% do not plan to add any part-time positions
- 33% plan to create 3 to 5 part-time positions, while 11% plan to add 1 to 2

Job titles for new roles include **Peer Support Specialist** (50%) and other titles like **Family Peer Support** or **Peer Support Outreach Specialist** (50%).

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### Recruiting Challenges & Strategies

**Vacancies:**

- Vacancies are common, with 75% of positions remaining unfilled for more than 1 month
  - (1-3 months, 35% | 6-12 months, 25% | 12+ months, 12.5%)

**Recruitment Challenges:**

- Main challenges include a lack of qualified candidates (70%) and low salaries (40%)

**Effective Recruitment Strategies:**

- Offering competitive salaries, benefits, and strong training programs have been successful for recruitment

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### Retention Challenges & Strategies

**Retention Challenges:**

- Burnout (64%) and low salaries (45%) are the primary issues affecting retention

**Effective Retention Strategies:**

- Supportive work environments (83%) and professional development opportunities (58%) are the most successful

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### Organizational Culture

**Supervision:**

- Direct supervision varies; 42% report to a program administrator (without past experience as a Peer Support Specialist), while others report to Peer Support Specialists (25%) or other staff like clinical providers (16%)

**Organizational Culture:**

- Most employers (92%) report having a welcoming and inclusive culture for Peer Support Specialists
- Most organizations feel fully prepared (83%) to create a culture of support for Peer Support Specialists

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## Challenges

### Challenges to Culture of Support:

- **Funding limitations**

"Funding. Additional funding is sorely needed."

- **Need for more training and clarity about the Peer Support role, particularly among clinical staff.**

"I think sometimes clinicians are confused on the role of a Peer Support Specialist and expect them to take part in more clinical interventions. Some seem to believe that Peers should take on any patients are unwilling to engage in treatment as a measure to create that engagement. This can lead to burnout as many Peers can have high caseloads of resistant patients."

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## Key Takeaways

### Expansion of Roles

- Organizations plan to add lived experience positions, but some face uncertainty due to budget constraints

### Vacancies and Recruitment:

- Recruitment challenges include a lack of qualified candidates and low salaries
- Offering competitive pay, benefits, and strong training programs has been effective

### Retention Challenges:

- Burnout and low pay are major retention issues
- Supportive work environments and professional development opportunities help retain staff

### Supervision and Culture:

- Most organizations provide a welcoming culture for and feel prepared to support Peer Support Specialists
- Supervision structures vary
- Organizations generally feel prepared to support Peer Roles

### Challenges to Supportive Culture:

- Funding limitations and a need for clearer role definitions, especially for clinical staff, are key challenges in building a fully supportive environment

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## Building Career Pathways for the Peer Support Workforce

**Entry-Level:** Peer Support Specialist roles that use lived experience to support others

**Certifications:** Typically require CPSS or CRSW certification along with relevant training

**Mid-Level Roles:** Opportunities include Peer Mentor positions, often with supervisory responsibilities

**Leadership:** Advanced positions like Program Coordinators, Administrators, or Peer Support Trainers, requiring more experience and ongoing education

**Challenges:** Limited career progression due to low pay, high workloads, and lack of structured pathways across sectors

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## Discussion

Building Career Pathways for the Peer Support Workforce

In your groups, create a visual 'ladder' or 'tree' that shows potential career steps for Peer Support Specialists in New Hampshire.

Think about:

1. **Entry-Level:** What are the basic requirements?
2. **Mid-Level:** What roles come next? What additional certifications, education, or experience are needed?
3. **Advanced Roles:** What positions could be available?
4. **Cross-Sector Opportunities:** What sectors could Peer Positions interact with? How could these roles transition across different these sectors?

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## Propose Career Pathways and Recommendations

As a group, develop **two potential career pathways** for Peer Support Specialists

- One focused on **clinical or supervisory roles**
- Another focused on **leadership, training, or administrative roles**

### Discussion Question:

How can we integrate more **flexibility** in these pathways to ensure Peers can move between roles and sectors (e.g., social services, public health)?

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## Share and Discuss

Present your group's proposed career ladder or tree to the larger group.

Highlight any recommendations for new certifications, mentorship programs, or education requirements.

### Final Discussion Questions:

What are the biggest **barriers** to creating these career pathways in New Hampshire?

How can we address these barriers and **make it easier** for Peers to advance in their careers?

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## Next Steps

### If your organization has not taken the survey, please do.

- Additional responses will contribute to the body of knowledge informing this work, which will be completed by February

### Assess your organization for its readiness to support Peer Support Specialists

**Your Voice Matters**  
By participating, you'll contribute valuable insights that will directly influence the development of resources and training for your support specialists. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of those seeking and receiving support.



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