Peer Support in Georgia

The Basics

Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. - SAMHSA

Who are peer support workers?
The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) describes peer support workers as “people who have been successful in the recovery process who help others experiencing similar situations.”

What do peer support workers do?
The role of peer support workers varies widely, but many peer support workers:
- Support recovery from mental health or substance use disorders
- Teach and practice skills that promote recovery
- Mentor people in recovery both individually and in groups
- Raise awareness of personal, interpersonal, and community resources
- Advocate for and represent people in recovery

Georgia’s Peer Support Programs

What’s the history of peer support in Georgia?
The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network was founded in 1991, supporting the role of peers’ voices in mental health care. In 1999 Georgia became the first state to get approval from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to pay for peer services using the Medicaid program. In 2001 Georgia established the first formal certification program for peer support workers. Thanks to trailblazing work by peer support workers in Georgia, CMS endorsed the widespread use of Georgia’s program model in 2007.

Who certifies peer support workers in Georgia?
The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network trains Certified Peer Specialists (CPT), who are eligible to bill for services under Georgia’s Medicaid coverage. A modest fee covers training materials and does not include housing or transportation during training. Training is subject to availability at five sessions hosted annually.

What is required to become a Certified Recovery Peer Specialist?
Certified Peer Specialists must:
- Have a mental health diagnosis for at least one year and be willing to share their lived experience
- Have a high school diploma or general equivalency diploma (GED)
- Attend a two-week training and pay the associated fee
- Have strong communication skills, as indicated by application responses
- Have demonstrated experience with leadership, advocacy, or governance
- Pass an exam following training
- Complete 12 continuing education hours each calendar year

The Status of Peer Support in Georgia

How many mental health care providers in Georgia offer peer support services?6

Georgia has a relatively high proportion of community mental health centers and outpatient mental health facilities that offer peer services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility type</th>
<th>Total count</th>
<th># with peer services</th>
<th>% with peer services</th>
<th>% in Southeast</th>
<th>National %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric hospital</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inpatient psychiatric unit of a general hospital</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential treatment center for children</td>
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<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential treatment center for adults</td>
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<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>54%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community mental health center</td>
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<tr>
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<td>22%</td>
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<td>31%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Does Georgia Medicaid cover peer support services? 

Georgia Medicaid provides reimbursement for peer services without copayment7.

References