

Certified Peer
Support Specialist
curriculum and training
modules

Module 7: Behavioral health recovery

Introduction

This module explores the concept of "recovery" through a personal lens, and focuses on how peer support can be a transformative and empowering tool for peers facing a variety of behavioral health challenges.

Recovery is a deeply personal journey, one that can look different for everyone depending on their unique experiences and needs. Peer support plays a vital role in this process, especially for those living with substance use disorders (SUD), mental health challenges, and problem gambling and gaming behaviors.

This module will equip you with the skills and knowledge necessary to support individuals in overcoming their challenges to ultimately live with hope and a brighter future.

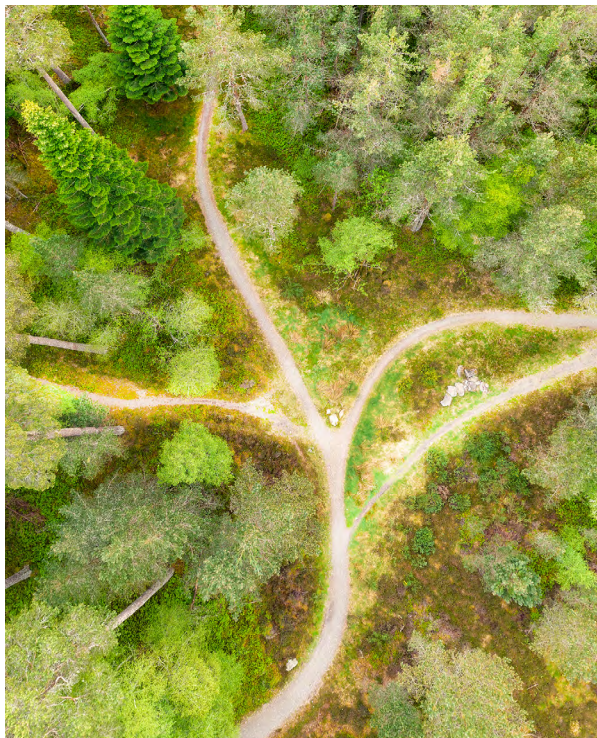
Learning objectives

- Identify principles and practices of behavioral health low barrier interventions
- Learn about challenges with co-occurring disorders
- Understand gambling and gaming dependence
- Recognize stages of change
- Learn how to best support families with behavioral health challenges

Understanding recovery

Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) defines recovery as **a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential**¹.

Recovery signals a dramatic shift in the expectation for positive outcomes for individuals who experience mental and substance use conditions or the co-occurring of the two.



Many pathways to recovery

Recovery is a highly individualized journey that takes many paths, each shaped by a person's unique needs, experiences, and goals. These paths include **clinical approaches** like therapy and medication, **holistic practices** such as mindfulness and exercise, **peer support** from individuals with lived experience, community-based resources like support groups, and **personal strategies** like engaging in hobbies or spiritual practices.

Utilizing these pathways involves exploring and combining what resonates most with the individual, fostering self-determination and empowerment. Recovery thrives when individuals have access to diverse tools and are supported in their choice to navigate these paths in their own way and time.

Programs like Wellbriety (wellbrietymovement.com/about-us) and the Red Road to Recovery (theredroad.org/issues/native-american-substance-abuse) are centered around Tribal spiritual practices, focusing on healing the mind, body, and spirit through cultural teachings, ceremonies, and community support. These programs emphasize the importance of connection to one's heritage and traditions in fostering long-term recovery. Other culturally informed approaches include Recovery Dharma (recoverydharma.org), and Refuge Recovery (refugerecovery.org) which are Buddhist-based recovery programs that integrate mindfulness and meditation practices.

¹ store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-s-Working-Definition-of-Recovery/PEP12-RECDEF

SAMHSA's guiding principles

SAMHSA's guiding principles of recovery are a set of **beliefs that shape and support the recovery journey** for individuals overcoming mental health and substance use challenges. These principles were developed through input from people with lived experience in recovery, their families, healthcare providers, and mental health organizations.

The goal in establishing guiding principles was to create a framework that respects the unique needs of everyone, recognizing that recovery is a deeply personal and varied journey.

SAMHSA's 10 guiding principles

- **Hope:** Recovery begins with a belief in the possibility of a better future. Hope is a foundation that inspires and motivates people toward positive change.
- **Person-driven:** Each person's recovery journey is unique, and they are in charge of their own path to recovery. They make choices and set their own goals.
- **Many pathways:** Recovery is not a "one-size-fits-all" process. It can look different for everyone and may include different methods, from counseling to peer support.
- **Holistic:** Recovery affects every part of life, including mental, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual well-being.
- **Peer support:** Connecting with others who have lived experience is vital. Peer support provides encouragement, understanding, and shared experience.
- **Relational:** Healthy relationships with family, friends, and the community are essential to healing and sustained recovery.
- **Culture:** Recognizing and honoring a person's background and cultural identity is an important part of the recovery process.
- **Addresses trauma:** Many people in recovery have experienced trauma, making it essential to acknowledge and address it as part of the healing process.
- **Strengths and responsibility:** Recovery focuses on building a person's strengths and supporting them to take responsibility for their health and well-being.
- **Respect:** Recovery is built on respect for people's rights, their potential, and their individual journey.

These principles guide programs and services aimed at supporting individuals on their paths to recovery, ensuring that such approaches are compassionate, inclusive, and flexible to meet diverse needs.

With a better idea of the definition of recovery, let us now consider how peer support uplifts individuals with an array of challenges.

Peer support can be effective in almost any situation. In this module we are exploring only a few areas where peer support can be extremely effective. You will notice that some of the themes repeat themselves. No matter what challenge a peer may be experiencing, if you as a Certified Peer Support Specialist have that lived experience, you can be impactful in someone else's recovery.

Activity

Guiding recovery principles

Get into groups of three or four people. For about 15 minutes, consider and choose three of SAMHSA's Guiding Principles of Recovery to discuss. Pick one person to take notes and another to share with the larger group. Together, answer these questions:

- How do the principles you picked relate to peer support?
- What do these principles look like in action when engaging in peer support as a Certified Peer Specialist?

Peer support and challenges with substance use

Certified Peer Support Specialists have a variety of lived experiences they can draw from. Recovery from alcoholism, opioid use/abuse, problem gambling or eating disorders are a few of the areas they can be effective in. For peer support to be an important tool in a peer's recovery toolbox, it is important to understand substance use disorder and SUD recovery.

Understanding SUD

Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is a medical condition characterized by an uncontrollable use of substances such as drugs or alcohol despite harmful consequences. It includes patterns of symptoms resulting from the use of a substance that leads to significant problems or distress.

Certified Peer Support Specialists work with people diagnosed with SUD in many ways. Because CPSSs have their own experiences with recovery, they know what it feels like and can share what supported them.

How you, as a Certified Peer Support Specialist, may put your lived experience to work:

- **Build trust:** Recognize and understand what it is like to have an SUD, so people feel comfortable opening to them. This trust is a big part of getting support.
- **Share your story:** Share personal stories of recovery. This shows others that change is possible, and it can make people feel hopeful about their own recovery.
- **Be supportive:** Support without judging. They listen and encourage people to think about their personal goals and dreams, supporting them to believe in themselves.
- **Offer emotional support:** Recovery can be an emotional journey. CPSSs are there to listen and support people in dealing with hard feelings. They know that recovery has ups and downs.
- **Celebrate small wins:** Cheer people on, no matter the size of the success. This supports people in building confidence and staying motivated.
- **Find resources:** CPSSs support people in finding connection with resources like housing, healthcare, or job training. These things can make recovery easier and improve overall life.
- **Teach relapse prevention:** Talk about triggers and ways to stay strong when tempted. They support people to make plans for tough situations so they can avoid relapse.
- **Offer hope:** Certified Peer Support Specialists remind people that recovery is a journey. They support people in seeing that mistakes happen but do not have to stop progress.

Certified Peer Support Specialists bring hope, understanding, and practical support to people exploring all kinds of recovery as we will cover in this module. The steps outlined can be used in many scenarios of peer support, making recovery feel possible.

Video

Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong | Johann Hari

www.youtube.com/watch?v=PY9DcIMGxMs

Recovery coaches versus Certified Peer Support Specialists

Recovery coaches are an important part of the behavioral health landscape who offer guidance, encouragement, and empathy to individuals and families navigating their paths to recovery from SUD. Grounded in the principles of peer support and mutual understanding, the role of recovery coach is built to navigate the complexities of recovery.

Not all recovery coaches are Peers. Anyone impacted by substance use disorders can become a recovery coach. Only Certified Peer Support Specialists and supervised Certified Peer Support Specialist Trainees can bill for Medicaid in Washington State for peer services rendered.

For more information on recovery coaches, visit the CCAR website: addictionrecoverytraining.org.

Ricky's Law

Ricky's Law, or the Involuntary Treatment Act (House Bill 1713), is a directive in Washington State that aims to improve access to substance use disorder treatment and support services. Named after Ricky D. Darnell, who struggled with addiction and died from an overdose, the law emphasizes the importance of getting people the support they need quickly and effectively.

In the context of peer support, Ricky's Law encourages Certified Peer Support Specialists to play a vital role in supporting individuals to connect with treatment options. This law allows Certified Peer Support Specialists to assist people in navigating the healthcare system, and it ensures that peers receive compassionate support and resources tailored to their unique needs.

This law highlights the value of lived experience and peer support in promoting recovery and reducing stigma surrounding addiction. The 2016 House Bill 1713 was updated in 2018 to enact vital changes to the behavioral health system and significantly amended RCW 71.05 and RCW 71.34 to include substance use in the Involuntary Treatment Act (ITA) process. This bill has been amended since to include an even more robust overview of behavioral health conditions that warrant judicial consideration.

Ricky's Law history

Representative Lauren Davis (32nd District, Washington) has spoken publicly about Ricky's Law, named in honor of her close friend, Ricky, who struggled with substance use disorder and tragically passed away. Ricky's Law is a piece of legislation aimed at improving access to treatment for individuals living with substance use disorders, particularly by making it easier for people to receive involuntary treatment when they are in a crisis and unable to seek help for themselves.

Representative Davis has shared that Ricky's struggles and his death were key motivators for her to push for this law as she witnessed firsthand the difficulties people with substance use disorders face in getting the care they need when they need it.

She has emphasized how much Ricky's story resonated with her and many others who experience the same barriers to treatment. By implementing Ricky's Law, Representative Davis hopes to help others avoid the painful experiences she and her friend went through. The law represents not just a policy change, but a deeply personal effort to create a system where people like Ricky can get the help they need before it's too late.

Video

Nuggets | Filmbilder & Friends

[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=HUnLgGRJpo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUnLgGRJpo)

Mitigation strategies

Mitigation strategies are a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at minimizing negative health, social, and legal impacts associated with drug or alcohol use and other high-risk activities. It includes measures such as needle exchange programs, supervised consumption sites, and use of prescription drugs. The use of prescription medication for withdrawal and maintenance is called medically assisted treatment (MAT).

Strategies

Peer support is a crucial component of wellness improvement planning and recovery from substance use. These strategies are about making safer choices, and peers can support people to feel empowered to do that. Certified Peer Support Specialists, who have been through similar struggles, can support others in making decisions that protect their safety while still respecting their dignity and choices.

The goal is to make things safer and to minimize the harm that can come from risky behaviors. Wellness improvement planning does not focus on forcing change but instead respects each person's choices and needs.

Wellness improvement planning is an important approach that focuses on keeping people safe and healthy while showing them respect and kindness. It helps individuals take small steps toward healthier choices at their own pace, without pressure or judgment.

As a Certified Peer Support Specialist, using mitigation strategies means meeting people where they are on their journey and supporting them to make positive changes, no matter how small they may seem. By offering understanding and compassion, you help people feel comfortable and confident in making choices that can lead to better health and well-being. Wellness improvement planning creates an environment where people feel safe to work on their recovery and make progress in their own time.

Overdose reduction: A true story from a Washington State peer

"After using substances for over 15 years, I did not know how I was going to stop. I gained recovery in the past but nothing I did ever worked long-term, and I would go back to using whatever I could get my hands on.

One day after my seventh overdose on heroin, I decided that I wanted more for my life. I talked to my doctor, and they let me know about Suboxone. Suboxone was something that I knew nothing about, so I made an appointment.

The nurse sat down with me and told me everything I wanted to know about Suboxone and answered all my questions. By the end of the appointment, I knew that I might have a chance to gain the recovery I always wanted.

Today I have been on Suboxone for four and a half years and it has changed my life forever. I received peer support and gained hope from every interaction I had."

Video

What is Health Risk Mitigation? | AIDS Action Europe Berlin

www.youtube.com/watch?v=FtFYMEOetAs

The Opioid Epidemic and recovery

Some people are dependent on, or in recovery from opioids. Opioids are class of substances that includes heroin, Vicodin, Oxycontin, fentanyl, and others. Many people, including some in the Supreme Court, blame pharmaceutical companies for the recent and drastic increase in people becoming dependent on opioids.

One of the most staggering statistics is that **between 1999 and 2020, nearly 500,000 people in the United States died from overdoses involving opioids**, including prescription and illicit forms. This highlights the devastating impact of the epidemic on individuals, families, and communities.

The Opioid Epidemic has its roots in the late 1990s when pharmaceutical companies reassured healthcare providers that prescription opioids were not addictive, leading to widespread overprescription. As addiction rates soared, many turned to opioids like heroin and fentanyl. The epidemic affects people of all ages, backgrounds, and communities, causing immense harm to individuals, families, and public health systems.

Certified Peer Support Specialists can support recovery by sharing their lived experiences, offering hope, and connecting individuals to resources like support groups, and Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT). MAT combines medications like methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone with counseling and behavioral therapies to treat opioid dependence. MAT helps reduce cravings, prevent relapse, and stabilize individuals in recovery, though it often carries stigma due to misunderstandings about using medication in treatment.

Certified Peer Support Specialists can support combatting this stigma by educating peers and communities about the effectiveness of MAT and advocating for a recovery approach that respects each person's journey.

Certified Peer Support Specialists can use their lived experience to support others

Certified Peer Support Specialists with lived experience of opioid use disorder (OUD) and overdose have a unique ability to connect with others facing similar struggles. You can use your own stories of recovery to offer hope and build trust.

- **Empathy and understanding:** Having gone through OUD or having experienced an overdose, Certified Peer Support Specialists understand how frightening and overwhelming these moments can be. Their personal experiences allow them to connect on a deeper level, offering nonjudgmental support and showing that recovery is possible.
- **Narcan training and support:** Certified Peer Support Specialists can teach others how to use Narcan, which empowers individuals and their loved ones to be prepared in case of an overdose. By sharing their experiences, Certified Peer Support Specialists can emphasize the importance of being ready and the relief that comes from knowing how to respond to an emergency.
- **Mitigation strategy guidance:** Many Certified Peer Support Specialists have used mitigation strategy techniques themselves, such as carrying Narcan, avoiding using alone, or knowing the signs of an overdose. They can share these strategies with others, offering practical advice while respecting the person's autonomy in their recovery.
- **Role models for recovery:** Seeing someone who has lived through OUD and overdose successfully manage their recovery can inspire hope. Certified Peer Support Specialists can be role models for others, showing that there are ways to live a safer and healthier life, even if they are not ready for full abstinence.

What is Naloxone?

Naloxone (the generic form of Narcan or Evzio) is a medication that can quickly reverse the effects of an opioid overdose. It works by blocking opioids from attaching to receptors in the brain, which can help a person start breathing again if they have stopped or slowed down due to an overdose. Naloxone is available as a nasal spray or injection, and it can be lifesaving when used during an emergency.

Why is Naloxone Important?

Naloxone is crucial because opioid overdoses can happen quickly, and without immediate help, they can be fatal. Naloxone can reverse the overdose long enough to get the person medical attention, saving lives. It is safe to use and does not harm someone if it turns out they aren't overdosing. Making naloxone widely available helps prevent deaths from opioids like heroin, fentanyl, and prescription painkillers.

Activity

Learn to implement naloxone

We will train together on what Narcan is and how to administer it. You will be given a box of naloxone or be shown resources on where you can get some. After reviewing the video, we will engage in a how-to activity.

Video

How to Use Narcan (Naloxone) Opioid Overdose Treatment | UC Davis Health

[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=Q8FjunfEUeg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8FjunfEUeg)

Activity

Accidental overdose practice

Get into groups of four to five people. One person will volunteer to pretend to be non-responsive. Two people will not know what to do, and one person will have Narcan and pretend to administer it. Follow the steps you learned in the video.

Remember:

1. Ask for consent before you touch anyone ever!
2. Tell the person your name and speak to them as if they were awake even when they are non-responsive
3. They may be angry when they wake up because they will not be high anymore.
4. Be prepared with treatment resources in case there is a window for recovery

Peer support, mental health, and recovery

Certified Peer Support Specialists are an important part of a team serving people with mental health challenges. Through their lived experiences and specialized training, Certified Peer Support Specialists offer unique insights, empathy, and practical support to those navigating the complexities of behavioral health systems in Washington State.

What is a mental health challenge? A mental health challenge refers to difficulties in thinking, feeling, or behaving that can affect a person's ability to function in daily life. These challenges can include but are not limited to conditions like depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or schizophrenia. They may also involve overwhelming stress, grief, or emotional struggles that interfere with well-being.

Mental health challenges can vary in severity, duration, and how they impact individuals, but with the right support, such as therapy, peer support, medication, and self-care, many people can manage these challenges and lead fulfilling lives.

Individuals and families can and do recover from mental illness!

Psychiatric hospitalization and recovery

Being in a hospital for the first time or any time can be comforting, or it can be scary. (We will discuss crisis situations in more detail in the Crisis Prevention and Intervention chapter of this manual.) A **Peer Bridger** is a form of Certified Peer Support Specialist, and they can connect with folks in hospitals.

Being in a psychiatric hospital can vary greatly depending on the individual, the type of hospital, and the reason for admission. However, there are some common aspects of the experience. If you have not had the experience do not try to relate to it. Instead use active listening and the other peer tools you have learned.

Remember, you do not have to have the exact same experience as the peer you are supporting. It is good to be aware of what someone may have experienced in a psychiatric hospital setting; consider these factors and how they may have impacted someone:

- **Focus on safety:** A primary goal is to ensure the safety of peers and staff. This often means that personal belongings are restricted, and patients might be under close observation. Certain items, like shoelaces or sharp objects, might not be allowed to minimize the risk of harm.
 - **Therapeutic activities:** Peers typically participate in individual and group therapy, recreational therapy, and sometimes skill-building workshops. These activities are designed to support peers understand their challenges, learn coping skills, and begin their recovery journey.
 - **Interaction with staff:** Staff, including nurses, therapists, and psychiatrists, play a key role. They provide medical and emotional support and support patients to manage their treatment plans. Peers often have regular check-ins with a psychiatrist to discuss medication if it is part of their treatment.
 - **Mixed emotions:** Being in a psychiatric hospital can bring a range of emotions from relief and hope to fear or frustration. Some people feel safe and supported, while others may feel restricted or stigmatized. It is common to feel a mix of relief for the support but also anxiety about being away from home or work.
 - **Varied lengths of stay:** The length of stay can vary. Some may be there for a few days, while others might need a longer stay, depending on their needs and treatment goals.
 - **Privacy and limited freedom:** Privacy can be limited due to the need for observation and safety protocols. Peers may not have access to phones or internet as they would outside, and they usually cannot leave without an order for discharge.
- Overall, a stay in a psychiatric hospital is intended to stabilize individuals, support them to develop strategies for managing their behavioral health, and prepare them for their next steps in recovery. Even with these positive goals and outcomes, staying in a hospital may be challenging or stressful.
- **Structured environment:** Psychiatric hospitals are highly structured environments with routines for meals, group therapy sessions, and activities. This structure helps create a sense of stability and predictability, which can be grounding for patients.

▶ Video

Welcome to the Psychiatry & Behavioral Medicine
Unit at Seattle Children's |
Seattle Children's

[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=bhQUqDCyn1o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhQUqDCyn1o)

Children, youth, families and hospitalization

In Washington State, getting a diagnosis for your child's mental or behavioral health can be overwhelming for a family. When your child is struggling through things like anxiety, depression, or behavioral challenges, it can be hard to understand what is happening and why. A family might feel scared, sad, or even frustrated, and it is common to wonder if they could have done something differently.

Sometimes, the best option for a child is to receive care in a hospital, especially if they need more help than can be provided at home. In Washington, there are hospitals that specialize in helping children and teens with behavioral health challenges. While it may be difficult to think about your child being away from home, these hospitals have staff who are specially trained to help kids through tough times and keep them safe.

Some hospitals in Washington State that specialize in behavioral health treatment for children and youth:

- Seattle Children's Hospital: Offers inpatient care for children with a range of behavioral health challenges
- Swedish Medical Center (Seattle): Provides behavioral health services for children and teens, including inpatient treatment
- Valley Medical Center (Renton): Offers a youth behavioral health program for inpatient care
- Harborview Medical Center (Seattle): Provides specialized services for children with behavioral health needs, including inpatient options
- Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center (Spokane): Offers inpatient care for children with behavioral health challenges

Moving forward with child or youth hospitalization for behavioral health reasons can be a difficult decision. Certified Peer Support Specialists can be a needed source of encouragement and perspective during these times. Remember, the goal is to help the family you are working with get on their recovery journey by offering tools to support them in that recovery.

Problem gambling and gaming recovery

Defining gambling

Gambling is the act of risking something of value on an uncertain event with various outcomes, including winning, breaking even, or losing. Gambling has three elements: something staked (like money), an outcome at least partly due to chance, and a potential prize. Examples of gambling include playing slot machines, roulette, or similar traditional casino games, sports wagering or betting, lotteries, or video games.

Many cultures have traditional gambling games that are an integral part of the culture, like mahjong or stick and dice games. And, over the past decade, access to online gambling has expanded dramatically, including online casinos, poker, and sports wagering that people can access on smart phones or laptops. The latest expansion is gambling on prediction markets, where people can wager on almost anything, from political moves to celebrity awards. Most adults can gamble recreationally and never be at risk for developing a problem with gambling. But for some, gambling will start to negatively impact their lives. An increasing percentage of teens (those aged 11 to 17) and young adults (those aged 18 to 25) are gambling in some form, mostly online; increased exposure and activity can lead to increased risk.

Problem gambling, also known as a gambling disorder, is characterized by a compulsive need to gamble despite harmful consequences. For those struggling with it, problem gambling can impact many areas of life and lead to financial devastation, damaged relationships, and mental and physical health challenges. It can affect a person's ability to maintain stability in their personal and professional lives..

Activity

Myths and facts about gambling

As a class, consider these scenarios and answer Yes/No or True/False

Recognizing gambling:

Is this gambling?

A friend plays video games, and he purchases different armor/clothing to “power up” his character.

☐ Yes ☐ No

I like to wager money on sporting events using an online app. Because it's online, and gambling online in Washington isn't legal, I'm not really gambling.

☐ Yes ☐ No

My teenager enjoys playing online games that include chances to purchase (with real money) loot boxes or other surprise items that aren't guaranteed.

☐ Yes ☐ No

Myths and facts about gambling: True or false?

No one can get addicted to gambling because you do not take or ingest anything.

☐ True ☐ False

Problem gambling is only a financial challenge.

☐ True ☐ False

People struggling with gambling are likely to have at least one other behavioral health issue that is impacting their life.

☐ True ☐ False

Video

The Silent Addiction | TEDx Talks

[www.youtube.com/
watch?v=bhQUqDCyn1o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhQUqDCyn1o)

Understanding problem gambling and Peer Support

Peers in recovery from problem gambling may experience an intense urge to gamble, escalate bets to chase losses, lie about or hide their gambling habits, and potentially resort to illegal activities to fund their gambling. In addition, they may also experience depression, anxiety, shame, and isolation.

People who are gaming excessively may experience disconnection from family and friends and other pleasurable activities they once enjoyed. They may develop sleep disorders, and if in school, skip homework and stay up all night gaming. They may have physical impacts from sitting still for long periods of time. They may be experiencing isolation, shame, and anxiety and/or depression.

People who are struggling with problem gambling and/or excessive gaming are both physically and psychologically addicted. As with other addictions, both gambling and gaming cause the brain to produce serotonin, dopamine and other hormones that can increase a person's dependence on the activity. This can lead to the highs and lows of the cycle of addiction. For people who want to change or stop their gambling or gaming behavior, working with a Certified Peer Support Specialist can be very supportive. Drawing upon your own lived experience to reduce the shame and stigma involved in problem gambling and/or gaming is a great place to start to build connections and provide hope for recovery..

According to The Evergreen Council on Problem Gambling (evergreencpg.org), an organization in Washington State that advocates for gambling awareness, prevention, and recovery, these are some signs that may indicate a peer is having challenges with gambling:

- Using credit cards to acquire funds to gamble
- A need to bet more money, more frequently
- Bragging about or hiding gambling activity
- Losing track of time while gambling
- Lying about wins or losses
- "Chasing" after wins, resulting in greater losses
- Neglecting family members to spend time gambling
- Restlessness or irritability when attempting to stop
- The growing preoccupation with gambling, where to get money to gamble with, or what to say to explain gambling losses of money or time
- Loss of control despite mounting negative consequences

Despite facing adverse consequences, people often find it challenging to control or stop their gambling behavior. As a Certified Peer Support Specialist, you can use your lived experience to reduce the shame and stigma involved in problem gambling. This is a good place to use your story to build connections and provide hope for recovery.

If you are working with a peer and they think they may be experiencing problem gambling, offer support by asking them to answer these questions. People who answer yes to two or more of these questions may wish to seek additional support.

Problem gambling questions

- Have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?
- Have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?
- Have you gone back another day to try to win back the money you lost?
- Have you borrowed money or sold anything to gamble?
- Have you felt that you might have a problem with gambling?
- Have people criticized your betting or told you that you had a gambling problem, whether or not you thought it was true?
- Have you felt guilty about the way you gamble or what happens when you gamble?
- Has gambling caused you any health problems, including stress and anxiety?
- Has your gambling caused any financial problems for you or your household?

Excessive gaming questions

- Do you set rules or limits with gaming and then break them, playing longer or more frequently than intended?
- Do you lose hours of sleep to gaming?
- Do you skip or neglect self-care (cooking, eating, bathing, cleaning, shopping, exercise, etc) when gaming?
- Do you find yourself gaming whenever you have free time?
- Have you ever sworn off a game, uninstalled it, and later returned to it?
- Do you often re-live gaming experiences or think about future ones?
- Have you ever used sick days or vacation days or skipped work or class just for gaming?
- Has gaming taken the place of any hobbies or sports you used to enjoy?
- Has your contact with in-person friends and family declined significantly since gaming?
- Have you ever taken a break from gaming and binged uncontrollably upon your return?
- Do you feel irritable and restless when away from games for some time?
- Do you forget or neglect appointments, responsibilities or deadlines in work, school, or family when gaming?
- When anxious, upset, or depressed, do you soothe yourself with games or plans to game?

Activity

Problem gambling questions

Find a partner. You will practice being both the peer and the Certified Peer Support Specialist.

Roles

The peer: You have indicated to your Certified Peer Support Specialist that you may have challenges with gambling or gaming. When asked the questions from assessment, you answer “yes” to at least two.

The Certified Peer Support Specialist: Ask the peer the questions from the assessment question lists on page 12. As the peer answers, you offer strengths-based, non-judgmental peer support using parts of their story to connect and provide hope.

- If problem gambling and excessive gaming is not a part of your story, how would you make sure the person you are supporting felt seen, heard and validated?
- Would you consider finding someone in recovery from problem gambling and excessive gaming for them to speak to? Why or why not?

Practice for ten minutes. Come back to the larger class to discuss your experience.

Impacts of problem gambling and excessive gaming

Gambling and gaming can be fun and recreational experiences for many people. However, the impacts of these activities extend beyond financial losses. Problem gambling can lead to emotional distress, including depression, anxiety, shame, and guilt. Relationships with family, friends, and colleagues may deteriorate because of the lifestyle that is required to sustain problem gambling. Problem gambling can cause a loss of self-esteem and a sense of hopelessness about the peer’s ability to change their behavior.

Many people like to spend free time gaming, for relaxation and fun, and to meet like-minded people online. Excessive gaming is a relatively new addiction, and the impacts people experience are still being studied. People who game excessively may experience detachment from the ‘real world,’ and this can also affect relationships, school, work, and other areas of life. This can lead to a isolation, depression, guilt, and shame.

As a Certified Peer Support Specialist with lived experience, you are the evidence that recovery can and does happen.

It can be difficult for peers to understand how they could get “hooked” on gambling or gaming when there is not always an immediate, tangible win and nothing is ingested. **Gambling and gaming activates the brain’s reward system, which releases dopamine, serotonin, and other “good feeling” hormones that give people a sense of satisfaction that they seek to repeat.**

Over time, the brain can become accustomed to these “brain chemicals” that can lead to addiction. To achieve the same thrill as a first ‘big win’ or gaming campaign, individuals may gamble more frequently, spending more money, time, and energy. People may end up spending hours and hours gaming that they used to spend doing other activities. The ups and downs of gambling and gaming can become addictive as well.

Certified Peer Support Specialist provide nonjudgmental support and understanding to peers with problem gambling and gaming challenges. Peer support offers a trauma-informed and empathetic space for peers to discuss their struggles without fear of stigma or condemnation. Certified Peer Support Specialist work collaboratively with peers to identify activating events that contribute to their gambling or excessive gaming and provide resources when asked.

Activity

Older adults and problem gambling

With a partner, read through the scenario about Julie. Each of you will choose a role – Julie and the Certified Peer Support Specialist. As the CPSS, use peer support values to engage Julie to discuss gambling and the impact it is having on her life. If you are providing peer support to Julie, think about how you would begin to explore recovery options and support her understanding through your lived experience that there is hope for recovery.

Julie's Story

Julie (she/her), 67 years old, retired from her long and fulfilling career as a teacher, a profession to which she had dedicated decades of her life. A year after her retirement, her wife passed away, leaving Julie with a profound sense of loss. One thing that brought a little distraction was joining her friends on their weekly trips to the casino.

At first, she went along to stay social and escape the loneliness. It was harmless fun. After a while, Julie started going by herself. The casino, with its bright lights and steady stream of activity, offered a welcome distraction from the emptiness she felt at home.

Over time, the excitement grew, and so did Julie's bets. Initially, it was just a few extra dollars that she would bet. But soon she was placing higher and higher wagers, convincing herself it was harmless since she was not drinking. (Julie had struggled with alcoholism in the past and had long been in recovery successfully.) Julie reasoned that gambling was not an addiction—it wasn't like alcohol; she wasn't ingesting anything harmful. Plus, the free meals and gifts she'd receive as a returning casino patron were nice distractions.

But after two years, her casual visits to the casino had spiraled into something more dangerous. She had burned through half of her retirement savings, and she found herself sneaking off to the casino as often as she could. She kept it all hidden from her family.

Shame and guilt started to creep in; Julie could not stop. When she would frequent the ATM to withdraw cash, she would see the sign with the Washington State Problem Gambling Helpline number (1-800-547-6133), and she always ignored it.

Julie, in recovery from alcoholism, did not realize that her gambling had become another form of dependence – one that was slowly taking over her life. She rationalized that because it was not alcohol or drugs, it could not be as serious.

However, the patterns were all too familiar: hiding her behavior, lying to her family, and feeling a compulsive need to gamble, no matter the cost.

Questions to consider:

- How would you introduce yourself to Julie and share your own recovery journey to build trust?
- What trauma-informed principles would you use to ensure Julie feels safe and understood?
- How can you validate her experience without minimizing the impact of her gambling?

Josh's story

Josh (he/him), a 16-year-old, has been gaming online since he was 11. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he spent several hours online each day, playing social media games with friends and with others online. His parents understood that, as a teenager, he needed connections to others; since his classes had all moved online, this was his main way of interacting with other people during his free time. However, when school resumed in person, he continued spending hours online and in the past year or so, his time online has only increased. Now he's finding that he's staying up sometimes until 2 a.m. or later, and his grades are starting to fall. He's unable to focus well in class, due to a lack of sleep, and his parents are concerned and have brought him in for help to the behavioral health clinic. He's being evaluated for excessive gaming/internet use disorder, but he really wants to talk to someone who has the life experience of being in recovery.

Josh says he is feeling very anxious, tired, and frustrated with his parents for interfering in his life, though he also knows they mean well.

Questions to consider:

- How would you approach talking with Josh about his recovery journey?
- What resources could you suggest to Josh if he wants additional support?

Peer Support and gaming disorders recovery

Problem gaming is identified by compulsive engagement in games, lying about gaming habits, neglecting personal hygiene and physical health, and putting gaming over other activities such as eating, sleeping, or attending school or work.

Individuals with gaming disorder may feel anxious or irritable when they are not gaming. They use gaming as an escape from stress or negative feelings. They may experience mood swings related to success or failure in games. Headaches, eye strain, and carpal tunnel syndrome can result.

Gaming disorder manifests in difficulty controlling when and how long the person games and a disregard for when it begins to crowd out other interests and activities. Gaming disorder can also be a concern if the person gaming is neglecting their obligations, and if the gaming persists despite poor outcomes such as relationship problems, trouble with work or school, or health concerns.

Peer support groups such as Online Gamers Anonymous (olganon.org) can provide support and shared experience for individuals struggling with gaming. A Certified Peer Support Specialist can help a peer to develop a more balanced way of living, including identifying and relying on natural supports like friends, family, and social connections. These natural supports can keep the person engaged and connected positively in ways that aren't gaming-related.

Youth and gaming disorders

Certified Peer Support Specialists who work with young people should be alert for any signs that the peer they are working with may have a challenge with gaming. But keep in mind gaming and gaming disorder is not limited to young people, even though the common belief is that more young people are engaged in gaming than not. According to current research, the average age of a gamer is 30 while 32% of people who actively game are under the age of 18.

Peer Support and eating disorders recovery

Eating disorders are characterized by abnormal eating behaviors, thoughts, and emotions. People who struggle with eating disorders may have a preoccupation with food, body weight, and shape. These preoccupations may lead to unhealthy patterns of eating and activity that can impact physical and mental well-being.

Common types of eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder.

- **Anorexia Nervosa:** Anorexia nervosa is characterized by extreme restriction of food intake, intense fear of gaining weight, and a distorted body image. People with anorexia may severely limit their calorie intake, engage in excessive exercise, and show physical signs such as rapid weight loss, fatigue, and thinning hair.
- **Bulimia Nervosa:** Bulimia nervosa involves recurrent episodes of binge eating followed by compensatory behaviors such as self-induced vomiting, misuse of laxatives or diuretics, fasting, or excessive exercise. People with bulimia may have feelings of guilt, shame, and loss of control about their eating behaviors.
- **Binge-eating disorder:** Binge-eating disorder is characterized by recurring episodes of eating large quantities of food in a short period, accompanied by a sense of loss of control and distress. Unlike bulimia, individuals with binge-eating disorder do not typically engage in compensatory behaviors. Binge-eating can lead to unhealthy weight gain and associated health risks.

Certified Peer Support Specialists in eating disorder recovery play a key role in supporting peers with eating disorders by sharing their lived experiences and offering hope. Certified Peer Support Specialists understand how hard it can be to face the challenges of recovery and can support peers to feel less alone in their struggles. They listen without judgment, encourage peers to set small, realistic goals, and remind them that recovery is possible, even if it takes time.

Certified Peer Support Specialists can also support peers to find helpful resources, such as support groups, counselors, or nutritionists, while respecting each person's unique path to recovery. They encourage peers to celebrate progress, no matter how small, and focus on building a positive relationship with food and their bodies.

By being compassionate and understanding, you will provide the encouragement peers need to keep moving forward on their recovery journey.

Peer Support and co-occurring disorders recovery

Co-occurring disorders (COD) indicate someone has more than one diagnosis at a time. Co-occurring disorders include mental health challenges, like depression or anxiety, as well as struggles with substance use, such as drugs or alcohol. This is especially hard because both challenges in COD affect each other. For example, someone might use substances to try to feel better when they are sad or anxious, but then the substance use can make their mental health worse over time. It is a cycle where each challenge makes the other harder to deal with or manage, and this makes recovery even more complicated.

Certified Peer Support Specialists can provide understanding, empathy, and hope to peer with COD based on their own lived experience. Certified Peer Support Specialists help peers by actively listening to their concerns and challenges, and by offering support that respects their choices. By building trust and focusing on the strengths and goals of the peer, a Certified Peer Support Specialist can encourage small, meaningful steps toward recovery.

Certified Peer Support Specialists also empower individuals to explore healthy ways of coping, provide emotional support, and share resources that can help the peer address both their mental health and substance use in a balanced way.

Remember, symptoms of one disorder can mask or mimic symptoms of the other, making it challenging to develop an effective recovery plan. Further, people with co-occurring disorders often face a higher risk of relapse, homelessness, incarceration, and suicide.

Ethical considerations

When a peer has co-occurring disorders, it can be challenging to know what to work on first. Best practice is to check in with the peer, and in a safe, nonjudgmental space, ask them what is disrupting their quality of life the most.

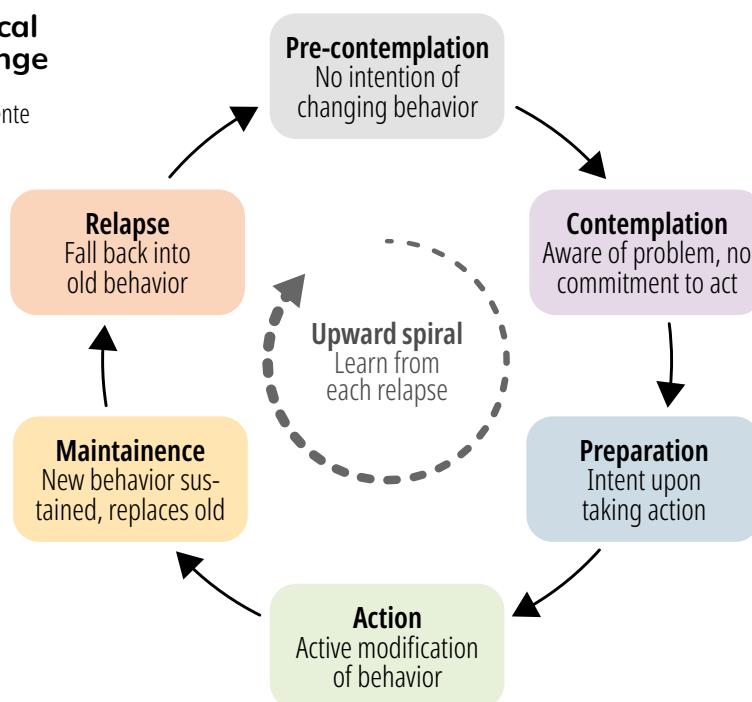
The importance of Peer Support for co-occurring disorders

Peer support can address both the mental health challenges and the substance use disorders together for effective recovery. Traditional treatment models that address these challenges separately often fall short, as they fail to consider the potential complications between the two disorders. Washington State has mandated an integrated approach in behavioral health services since 2017.

Stages of change and Peer Support

Transtheoretical Model of Change

Developed by Prochaska and DiClemente



The Stages of Change Theory, also known as the Transtheoretical Model, outlines the typical stages that individuals go through when making significant behavioral changes. It is often used for supporting people with behavioral health challenges, like substance use disorders.

This theory aids Certified Peer Specialists to understand how to work with peers at each stage of change. These stages (first developed by Prochaska and DiClemente) have been modified a bit over time to reflect best practices and current medical knowledge.

Stages of change explained

- **Precontemplation:** The person is unaware of a need to change and is possibly not considering change because they have not experienced any real problems from their behavior yet, or they don't feel a need to change.
- **Contemplation:** The person notices consequences from their behavior and is beginning to wonder if they should change.
- **Preparation:** The person is actively planning to change. They are getting ready to take action.
- **Action:** The person starts taking steps toward change. They are identifying and enacting the things they need to do to keep the change going, starting with day one.

- **Maintenance:** The person is working to keep their new behavior going and stay on track.
- **Relapse:** This used to be called "termination;" this stage happens when the person reverts to old, challenging behaviors, usually because those behaviors are familiar and predictable even if problematic. Relapse happens; it is a chance to learn and keep moving forward.

Why are Stages of Change important?

The Stages of Change Theory helps Certified Peer Support Specialists understand what kind of support most helpful at each stage is. It also supports realistic goal setting with peers based on where they are in the change process.

If someone wants to set a goal but isn't ready for action yet, use reflective listening to support the peer to think through it. We listen and let them talk it out until they are ready to move forward or decide to wait.

Video

The Stages of Change Model | Dovetail Qld
www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayjXMix-nMw

What if someone is not ready to act or create goals?

If someone is not ready to make a big change, that is okay! As a Certified Peer Support Specialist, you can support them by being understanding and nonjudgemental no matter where they are on their journey.

Sometimes people need time to feel ready, and we can be good listeners and encourage them without pushing. It is important to respect their choices, even if we do not agree or completely understand why they are making them. By being patient and showing that we care, we can create an environment for them to feel safe and supported whenever they decide to take the next step.

Activity

Identifying stages of change with COD

In small groups of three or four, choose a scenario and read it out loud. Each person in the scenario has a co-occurring disorder. As a group, identify which Stage of Change each peer is currently in and consider these questions:

1. How would you support the peer in moving forward, given the Stage of Change you believe is present? Be creative!
2. What do you think is the best way to find out what stage of change the peer you are working with is in?
3. How do you as a CPS decide what to work on first when COD is present?

Alice (she/her): Alice has been in recovery from opioids and an eating disorder for about six months now. You are working with Alice as a Certified Peer Support Specialist, supporting her recovery from SUD and behavioral health challenges. Alice has been seeing her boyfriend on and off for the last year. Today she tells you that the boyfriend “dumped me” and she is very upset. She is not sure she can maintain her recovery now that this has happened. All she wants to do is use and eat her heart out.

Olivia (she/her): Olivia is a peer you have been working with for the last few weeks. You know that she has co-occurring behavioral health challenges and has been attempting to limit her smoking and drinking. This causes challenges for her chronic lung disease. Today her wheezing and coughing seem worse, and she is struggling to breathe. She says, “I wish I could breathe freely just for a few minutes. It is so hard to quit smoking! Tonight, at the bar I am going to try to use a vape.”

Henry (he/him): Henry has been drinking to excess for at least five years. He is a self-reported insomniac. He has been referred to services because he just got his second DUI and his spouse has been threatening him with divorce. His job performance is suffering, and he risks losing his job if he has further consequences. He is not very happy about being here, but he reluctantly agreed to try peer support.

Mateo (he/him): Mateo has been participating in peer support services, with you as the Certified Peer Support Specialist, after coming to your agency for mental health challenges. Today, while sharing about weekend plans, Mateo tells you that he and a friend just bought some cannabis from the local dispensary, and they plan to use it this weekend. You ask Mateo how he feels about it. He responds, “It’s just a weekend thing and it’s not a problem.” You wonder if Mateo should have an evaluation for SUD.

Strategies to support families

Certified Peer Support Specialists can employ several strategies to support families facing any number of behavioral health challenges. Do your research, find resources and partner with the family. It is best for a Family Certified Peer Support Specialist to work with another family member; any Certified Peer Support Specialist can be supportive and assist with resources.

When working with families, offer these five supports:

- **Education and information:** Provide families with accurate information about the challenges, treatment options, and recovery processes. Understanding the conditions can reduce stigma and empower families to seek support.
- **Emotional support:** Offer a listening ear and empathetic support. Validate their feelings and experiences and provide a brave space for them to express their concerns and fears.
- **Resource connection:** Support families to access resources such as support groups, counseling services, financial assistance programs, and educational workshops.
- **Skill building:** Share coping strategies and communication skills to improve family dynamics and resilience. Encourage healthy boundaries and self-care practices for family members.
- **Advocacy:** Support families in navigating healthcare systems, advocating for their loved ones, and accessing necessary services.

Impact of Substance Use Disorders on families and communities

Impact on families

Behavioral health challenges can have far-reaching effects on family dynamics and individual family members.

- **Emotional strain:** Family members often experience a range of emotions, including fear, anger, guilt, and Helplessness. The unpredictability of SUDs can create a constant state of anxiety and stress.
- **Financial hardship:** The cost of supporting a family member with a behavioral health challenge, including treatment expenses and potential loss of income, can lead to significant financial strain.
- **Relationship breakdown:** Trust and communication within the family can break down, leading to conflicts, estrangement, and, in some cases, domestic violence.
- **Role disruption:** Family members may take on new roles or responsibilities, such as caregiving, which can disrupt normal family functioning and lead to burnout.

Impact on communities

Communities are affected by behavioral health challenges in various ways.

- **Public health concerns:** Increased rates of infectious diseases, overdoses, and mental health challenges can strain public health resources.
- **Economic impact:** Behavioral health challenges can reduce workforce productivity and increase healthcare and criminal justice costs.
- **Social disruption:** Higher rates of crime, homelessness, and child welfare cases can destabilize community cohesion and safety.
- **Stigma and isolation:** Individuals and families affected by SUDs may face stigma, leading to social isolation and reluctance to seek support.

Family and community-based recovery

Families play an important role in a person's recovery journey, but they often need support too. Certified Peer Support Specialists can help families understand what their loved ones are going through and give them tools to support recovery. Certified Peer Support Specialists use their own experiences to share hope and show that recovery is possible.

Certified Peer Support Specialists also support families to learn how to take care of themselves, set healthy boundaries, and find resources like support groups or counseling. By working with families, Certified Peer Support Specialists can support and build understanding and teamwork, making recovery a little easier for everyone involved.

To effectively support family and community-based recovery initiatives, Certified Peer Support Specialists should develop and enhance specific skills:

- **Facilitation and leadership:** Gain skills in leading support groups, workshops, and community meetings. Learn to facilitate discussions that encourage participation and collaboration. In Washington we have something called Family Youth System Roundtables where youth and family voice and choice are brought forward at the regional level.
- **Communication and advocacy:** Develop strong communication skills to effectively convey information, advocate for individuals and families, and engage with community stakeholders.
- **Conflict resolution:** Learn techniques for managing and resolving conflicts within families and community groups. Understand how to mediate disputes and promote peaceful resolutions.
- **Networking and partnership-building:** Build relationships with community organizations, healthcare providers, and local authorities to create a network of support and resources.
- **Cultural attunement:** Understand and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds and values of the individuals and communities you serve. Tailor your approach to meet the unique needs of different populations.
- **Collaboration with community organizations:** Work with local organizations, schools, and businesses to create supportive environments and disseminate information about SUDs and recovery resources.
- **Promoting recovery-friendly initiatives:** Advocate for policies and programs that support recovery, such as recovery-friendly workplaces, sober housing, and accessible treatment services.
- **Privilege and intersectionality in mitigation strategies and Peer Support:** People have different experiences based on things like their race, gender, or how much money they have. Some may have more advantages, while others face more struggles. In peer support and wellness improvement planning, it is important to understand how these differences affect the support someone needs.

✓ Skill check

Resource knowledge

Find a partner that is from or close to the same county or region as you. For about 20 minutes, discuss and write down the services in your community that address each of the behavioral health challenges that we have covered. Use a separate piece of paper if needed.

Some resources are listed at the end of the chapter and this activity is for you to identify support in your region. Include at least one youth, family, adult, and older adult resource.

Substance Use Disorder

Mental health

Co-occurring disorders

Mitigation strategies

Gambling and gaming disorders

Eating disorders

Module 7 summary

Behavioral health recovery

In this module, we learned important information about supporting others and their families on their recovery journeys. We delved into substance use disorder and mental health challenges, as well as co-occurring disorders, which happen when someone is facing more than one challenge at the same time. We learned that medication-assisted treatment can be a helpful option for managing substance use. We also learned about mitigation strategies, which are ways to keep peers safe and healthy while they make positive changes.

The module demonstrated how Certified Peer Support Specialists can support people and their families with eating disorders and problem gambling and gaming. We learned to **be empathetic and understanding, providing support without judgment, and to focus on the strengths of the person and family by encouraging them to take small steps toward their recovery goals.** Throughout the module, the importance of peer support, hope, and creating a brave space for people to explore their recovery journey was highlighted.

Key terms and resources

Resources are available digitally at hca.wa.gov/assets/program/82-0657-certified-peer-support-specialist-curriculum-resource-list.pdf.



Advocacy: The act of speaking up, supporting, or working on behalf of another person, often helping them access resources or protect their rights.

Co-occurring disorder: A condition wherein an individual has both a substance use disorder and a mental health disorder simultaneously. Effective treatment addresses both issues concurrently for better outcomes.

Eating disorder: A mental health condition characterized by abnormal eating habits and severe distress or concern about body weight or shape. Common disordered eating types are anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge-eating.

Gaming disorder: A condition wherein someone has difficulty controlling how much they play video games. Gaming disorder often manifests in an inability to prioritize everyday needs or tasks over gaming – like school, work, engaging with friends and family, or even hygiene – or an inability to see how playing video games is disrupting their lives (e.g. not sleeping or tending to their nutrition).

Mitigation strategies: A set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at minimizing negative health, social, and legal impacts associated with drug use and other high-risk activities. It includes measures such as needle exchange programs and supervised consumption sites.

Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT): A comprehensive approach to treating substance use disorders that combines the use of medications with counseling and behavioral therapies. MAT aims to provide a whole-patient approach to address both physical and psychological aspects of addiction.

Mental health: A state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to contribute to their community. Mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

Naloxone (Narcan): A life-saving medication designed to rapidly reverse opioid overdose. It is an opioid antagonist that binds to opioid receptors and can reverse and block the effects of other opioids, such as heroin, morphine, and oxycodone.

Problem gambling: A condition wherein someone has difficulty controlling how much they gamble and is often accompanied by an inability to control or understand the amount of time, money, and emotion used for gambling, even when it causes problems in their life (e.g. losing money, having arguments with family or friends, an inability to focus on school or work) or results in extreme anxiety.

Recovery coach: A nonclinical coach who provides support, guidance, and encouragement to individuals seeking to achieve and maintain recovery from substance use disorders or other addictive behaviors. Recovery Coaches do not always have lived experience of recovery from SUD.

Substance Use Disorder: A condition characterized by an uncontrollable use of substances such as drugs or alcohol despite harmful consequences. It includes patterns of symptoms resulting from the use of a substance that leads to significant problems or distress.