

Peer Respite

Overview

Peer respites are one of many peer-operated services offered in the behavioral health care field across the U.S. The peer movement has been steadily impacting behavioral health care systems for nearly 40 years. This has increased access to effective, low-barrier support for individuals experiencing behavioral health challenges.

Washington has a robust peer support workforce, having trained and certified over 7,200 Certified Peer Counselors since 2005. Certified Peer Counselors currently work in outpatient, inpatient, outreach, crisis, housing, employment, and other behavioral health settings. Peer services bring the relatability of shared lived experience, a message of hope, and practical tools to help individuals recover and improve their lives. In 2019, Peer Respite were part of the Governor's plan to transition/divert people from state hospitals. House Bill HB1394 saw the creation of Peer Respite. Washington's Department of Health created certification for licensed community behavioral health agencies to add peer respite to their book of business.

Peer-run organizations provide nearly exclusively peer support. They are evidence-based programs, that are researched and replicated in nearly every state. Washington has peer-run organizations scattered throughout the state. Peer Respite is another innovation added to the continuum of community-based behavioral health care services. Peer respites are frequently, but not always provided by peer-run organizations.

Peer respites are facilities that offer voluntary, short-term (up to seven days) 24-hour services in home-like settings. Once there, individuals in psychiatric distress can receive peer services to aid in their wellness and recovery to avoid more intensive levels of services.

The first clearly peer-run respite in the United States was *Stepping Stone* in New Hampshire in 1997. Rose House in New York followed in 2001 and Georgia Peer Respite in 2008. These respites were characterized by being fully peer-run rather than run under the clinical organization umbrella. Peer

Respites are staffed by trained peer specialist, individuals with lived experience in mental health challenges. This model of peer respite closely aligns with the values of peers and advocates in Washington State and nationally.

Peer respites typically are funded with county or state funding. Very few use Medicaid reimbursements. Peer respites in Washington State can bill Medicaid for the peer services provided to eligible participants.

In Washington, the primary service provided in peer respites is peer support by Certified Peer Counselors. Certified Peer Counselors help individuals evaluate their circumstances, problem-solve, and make decisions to move forward. The nature of peer-run services fosters an environment of respect and understanding. Peer interactions encourage participants to help themselves and others by building mutual relationships and learning from others. Respites often also provide self-help groups, housing and employment support, and group activities.

Status of implementation

In May of 2020, DOH completed new rules for Peer Respite as required in 2SHB1394. Department of Commerce awarded capital funds to organizations in Spokane and Pierce County. In 2022, Commerce awarded funds to an organization in Kennewick. In 2023, an award was given to an organization in Stanwood.

HCA contracts directly to provide technical assistance to the current awarded providers.

Eligibility

Peer Respite serve individuals who are in psychiatric distress but do not meet criteria for detainment or involuntary commitment. Individuals must be over 18 and enter the respite voluntarily.

Outcomes

Peer Respite have been shown to decrease the need for inpatient psychiatric care. The costs of Peer Respite are lower than most other facilities, with reduced Medicaid expenditures. Peer respites also see increased satisfaction with services, higher social functioning, and greater self-reported improvement.

Cost saving

Peer Respite operate at a fraction of the cost as compared to emergency rooms or inpatient psychiatric units. The average participant stays in a Peer Respite for five to seven nights.

Budget

SFY23 State General Funds \$708,000

SFY24 State General Funds \$708,000

Primary partners

Peer Respite partner with local crisis services, behavioral health treatment providers, behavioral health administrative service organizations, and managed care organizations.

For more information

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