

NEW ACCREDITATION MODEL FOR PEER SUPPORT

Council on Accreditation of Peer Recovery Support Services

Peer-based recovery support (PRSS) refers to assistance provided for recovery from severe alcohol and other drug-related problems. Rooted in peer support, non-professionals with experience of substance abuse provide recovery coaching and planning, skill-building groups and educational workshops, and peer-led support.

Many of these non-professionals have prior criminal justice involvement or face legal barriers to employment. Individual certification of peer supporters in this situation would restrict who can or cannot serve their communities.

Experts and stakeholders in the field of PRSS decided to pursue accreditation over certification for three broad reasons. One, accreditation allows for greater flexibility in the types of non-professionals that would be able to offer support. Two, accreditation places a greater emphasis on organizational improvement in quality of services. Three, accreditation can be used to complement existing certification of peer specialists who are certified to provide assistance with mental health disorders.

In 2011, Faces & Voices of Recovery, a national addiction recovery advocacy organization organized a meeting to explore the possibility of [developing an](#)



[accreditation system](#) for organizations and programs providing PRSS.

Two years later, the Council on Accreditation of Peer Recovery Support Services (CAPRSS) was created as a first national accrediting body for PRSS. In February of this year, [CAPRSS awarded five organizations](#) with full accreditation status in its first round of review.

PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE ACCREDITATION MODEL

What follows is a summary of the process that was taken to develop an accreditation model, and key lessons learned that could be applied generally to the field of peer support.

Step 1: Advisory Council

Based on the recommendations from the stakeholder meeting, an Accreditation Advisory Council was formed to develop a model of accreditation. The 25+ members of the advisory council represented a diverse range of perspectives and expertise.

Step 2: Developing the Framework and Model

The second step was to identify core domains for the accrediting body, which included: Principles (e.g., ethics, core values), People (e.g., peer leader development, coordinator development), Practices (organizational capacity, governance, management), and Performance (services quality, safety). Using these domains, 31 core standards were developed. Examples of the standards are listed below:

- *Recruitment: the program uses efficient and effective processes to recruit quality peer leadership.*
- *Confidentiality: The PRSS program has guidelines, policies, procedures, and practices related to maintaining confidentiality of personal information.*
- *Program record keeping: The organization establishes record keeping processes and methods that are compatible with peer-led efforts and that ensure recordkeeping compliance with state and federal regulations related to confidentiality and privacy.*
- *Supervising peers providing services: The program provides regular guidance, support, and skills-building through non-clinical supervision to all peer providers in a manner that adheres to peer ethical*

guidelines, whether supports/ services are provided at the program site, or elsewhere in the community.

Step 3: Assembling the System

Four subcommittees were created to assist with the accreditation process. The committees included an advisory council (oversight of the development process), a standards committee (developing realistic, measureable standards), a process management committee (designing and testing processes for each step of the accreditation system), and a technical assistance and support committee (outreach and communication with organizations that might seek accreditation).

Using the domains and core standards, the subcommittees were tasked with finalizing the accreditation model and developing a national accrediting body for PRSS.

LESSONS LEARNED THAT CAN BE APPLIED TO PEER SUPPORT

Lesson 1: Following an established process can assist the peer support field in developing an accreditation model

The advisory council relied on resources from health care accreditation bodies, such as the Joint Commission, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities, and the Community Health Accreditation Program. Following established accrediting bodies, they were able to ensure that standards were transparent, all domains were covered, and key stakeholders were involved throughout the process. These models laid the foundation for a structured

process for accrediting PRSS and developing best practices.

As stated in their white paper, “Part of the value of developing and implementing an accreditation system is the potential to use the process as a methodology for identifying, exploring, and using evidence-based practices”. A similar process could apply to and benefit peer support in establishment of an accrediting body.

Lesson 2: Accreditation can be applied to multiple organizations and settings by defining purposes, functional domains, and core standards

PRSS is used in a variety of settings and populations, each with its own unique needs and ways of providing support. In peer support for various conditions and populations, similar challenges emerge. Even the very definition of “who is a peer?” can vary depending on the situation.

Despite the diversity of organizational models, an accrediting body for PRSS with unified core standards was developed. The core domains were used to standardize the quality of services provided, while also acknowledging the cultural diversity represented within these services and the varying types of services provided.

In translating these models to peer support, similar ideas can be applied. Standards, such as supervision, recruitment procedures, or confidentiality will remain important across organizations and can thus be used as building blocks for creating an accreditation model.

Lesson 3: Accreditation can allow for greater flexibility in selection of peer supporters and improve quality of care

As seen in PRSS, many peer supporters are qualified to provide support because of their experience with certain communities or health outcomes. However, a lack of credentials required by certification, such as minimum education or literacy levels, may hinder organizations from finding qualified candidates to provide support. Where certification requirements for individuals are restrictive, organizational standards found in accreditation that allow for flexibility in training and hiring may be more beneficial.

In addition to broadening the candidate pool of peer supporters, an accreditation model like this emphasizes the responsibility of the organization in quality improvement and assurance, both of which are much needed for a peer support program to thrive.

Faces & Voices of Recovery and the Council on Accreditation of Peer Recovery Support Services have provided the basis for how accreditation in peer support could look. We congratulate them and the five organizations that were awarded full accreditation this year. We hope to continue learning about their experiences in accreditation of peer support.

READ MORE

Burden, E., Hill, T., Zastowny, T. (2012). Developing an accreditation system for organizations and programs providing peer recovery support services (white paper). Faces and Voices of Recovery, Washington, D.C. [\[link\]](#)