

Meeting Summary for Committee on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Behavioral Health Zoom Meeting

Jul 01, 2025 10:56 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada) ID: 978 0912 5603

Quick recap

Co-Chair Alice Forrester welcomed Dr. Becca Miller to discuss Recovery Support Specialists in mental health and substance use services. The discussion explored the importance of cultural awareness and intersectionality in healthcare, including the role of supervision and training for peer support specialists. The group concluded by examining the challenges in healthcare services and the potential of peer support specialists as advocates, while also addressing concerns about training, compensation, and billing practices for these roles.

Next steps

- Co-Chairs Alice Forrester and Brenetta Henry to discuss with Carelon about doing a presentation on their peer support work and ICCMs.
- Karen Siegel to provide information on community health worker initiatives from the Equity group.
- Sabrina Selk to consider having someone from Connecticut Health Foundation present on community health worker programs.
- A paper about the INSPIRE work at the HOPE clinic at MGH. Peer recovery coaches were key leads in designing this study and conducting the interviews.
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38789329/>
- Alice to identify and invite other presenters doing innovative work in peer support and community health in Connecticut.
- Alice to confirm whether there is a meeting in August or if the next meeting will be in September.
- Becca Miller to consider inviting colleagues interested in peer support work to participate in future workgroup meetings.
- Yvonne Jones (Carelon) to prepare information on Carelon's peer support specialist program, including application process, job openings, and compensation.
- Alice and Brenetta to consider developing recommendations for legislation regarding community health workers and peer support specialists from a DEI perspective.

Summary

Meeting Introduction and Technical Setup

Alice welcomes the group to the meeting and introduces Dr. Becca Miller as the presenter for the day.

Peer Support in Mental Health Services

Dr. Becca Miller, Director of Peer Support at Connecticut Mental Health Center, discusses the role of Recovery Support Specialists (RSS) in adult mental health and substance use services. She emphasizes the importance of having a diverse group of peer supporters to represent various backgrounds and experiences, as the shared lived experience is a crucial connection point. Dr. Miller also highlights the challenges of implementing peer support, including the risk of co-

optation and the stress of being the sole representative. The group discusses the potential intersection between peer support and community health workers, as well as the need to consider comorbidity in peer support roles.

Cultural Awareness in Healthcare Services

The group discusses the importance of incorporating intersectionality and cultural awareness into healthcare and support services. Brenetta emphasizes the need to address these issues during the intake process to ensure equitable care. Becca highlights the role of supervision in helping peer support specialists understand and address different identity experiences. Carlos Blanco shares an example of how cultural understanding can lead to more comprehensive care, contrasting it with a more rigid approach. The conversation concludes with a discussion on the need for better collaboration between different health services and the importance of uniform training and expectations for peer support roles.

Peer Support in Healthcare Challenges

The discussion focuses on the challenges in healthcare services and the potential role of peer support specialists. Participants express frustration with the current healthcare system, noting that patients often feel ignored and receive inadequate care. The group explores the idea of using peer support specialists as advocates and disruptors in the system, but also highlights concerns about their low pay and the need for proper training. Dr. Loida Reyes emphasizes the importance of ongoing, comprehensive training for all healthcare practitioners in diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as effective communication skills. Becca describes the training process for peer support specialists, which includes learning to share personal stories, develop listening skills, and facilitate groups while maintaining a balance between being part of the system and acting as a disruptor within it.

Advocacy and Sustainability in Behavioral Health

The group discusses the importance of peer support specialists and community health workers in behavioral health, emphasizing their role as advocates and disruptors. Karen Siegel suggests combining advocacy efforts for more robust reimbursement across different health worker communities. Brenetta raises concerns about the sustainability of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, urging proactive planning. Alice proposes making recommendations to legislators regarding cultural fit for community health workers and peer support specialists. The discussion highlights the need for multiple specialists, holistic approaches, and addressing stigma at all levels. Yvonne from Carelon confirms the critical role of peer support as a bridge to treatment, emphasizing the value of lived experience in contributing to overall wellness.

Peer Support Specialist Program Discussion

The group discusses peer support specialists and community health workers, including their training, compensation, and billing practices. Becca explains that peer support specialists at Carelon earn between \$21-23 per hour and bill under targeted case management codes. The group expresses interest in learning more about these roles and decides to invite Carelon to give a presentation on their peer support program at a future meeting. Alice suggests inviting other organizations to share information about community health workers as well. The next meeting is scheduled for September 2nd, as there is no meeting in August.