Informal and Formal Family Peer Support: The Impact and Evidence

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Family peer support offers hope and community to families supporting loved ones with mental health and substance use challenges, serious mental illnesses, and serious emotional disturbances. Both research and personal experiences highlight the positive impact of these services.

Panelists shared insights into family peer support, including its evidence base and real-world applications. Kyllor and Crystal DeGraff, parents with lived experience, shared how peer support transformed their lives. TN Voices CEO Rikki Harris described her organization’s formal peer support services, including direct support, training, and advocacy. Dr. Teri Brister from NAMI discussed the NAMI Basics program, an evidence-based informal peer support model for family caregivers. Dr. Kimberly Hoagwood, a researcher and evaluator of peer support programs, emphasized the need to expand the evidence base for both formal and informal family peer support services.

Moderated by Dana LaBranche, the discussion highlighted how person-centered, family-driven behavioral health approaches, like family peer support, foster equity by connecting families to resources and co-creating plans to achieve their goals, ultimately ensuring access to holistic mental health support.

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