

# UTILIZING PEER SUPPORT TO INCREASE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

## What is Peer Support?

States are increasingly exploring pathways to expand the workforce by incorporating roles that require less formal education. This shift addresses workforce shortages, increases access to mental health services, and creates opportunities for individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences. You can read more about this workforce expansion on the National Center [Knowledge Hub](#). This resource highlights one such pathway: peer support. As of 2023, 49 states have formal credentials for peer professionals.

[Mental Health America](#) describes peer support “peer support creates spaces for individuals to feel less alone and learn from others who have faced similar challenges.” Peer support is empowering to the individual and family. [SAMHSA](#) outlines the core principles of peer support:

- **Recovery-oriented**
- **Person-centered**
- **Voluntary**
- **Relationship-focused**
- **Trauma-informed**

Peer specialist roles typically exist in two areas: substance use and mental health recovery. In mental health, peer support specialists work in hospitals, mental health clinics, primary care settings, and correctional facilities. The child welfare system also utilizes Parent Peer Support (PPS) Providers.

Parent Peer Support Providers are trained to use their lived experience as primary caregivers of children or youth with behavioral health needs to offer both emotional and practical support to other caregivers. They assist caregivers in navigating complex child-serving systems, accessing services that best fit their family, building parenting knowledge and skills, and fostering collaborative partnerships with professionals involved with their families.



### Connect

Connect with the family through shared lived experience



### Support

Reduce isolation, provide validation and foster resiliency



### Navigate

Facilitate access to services and supports for the child and family



### Train

Provide training for families, providers and communities



### Engage

Engage in policy-making and advisory groups



### Educate

Provide education, information, problem-solving and skill-building



### Evaluate

Participate in evaluation, research and CQI activities



### Advocate

Model effective advocacy and collaboration skills

## How Does PPS Benefit Families?

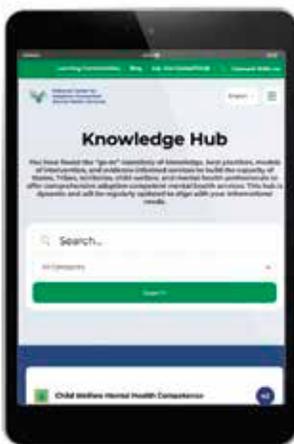
Parent Peer Support (PPS) is one of the most effective ways to engage parents and families in services. Partnering with families in this way leads to positive outcomes for children, youth, and caregivers:

- **Enhances family well-being:** Improves adjustment and functioning, stabilizes the family, reduces parent stress, and increases parental confidence and skills.
- **Combats isolation:** Involvement with the child welfare system can be isolating. PPS provides families with someone who has navigated similar experiences, offering support, guidance, and connection.
- **Supports family preservation:** Reduces the time children spend in out-of-home care and increases the likelihood of reunification.
- **Prevents deeper involvement:** Helps families address challenges early, reducing the risk of further child welfare involvement.



## How Does PPS Benefit Child Welfare Professionals?

PPS Providers serve as partners in supporting families and can act as a bridge between parents and child welfare professionals, helping each side understand the other's perspectives and goals. By assisting families in engaging more effectively in services, PPS Providers contribute to positive outcomes for agencies—such as improved quality of care and higher staff satisfaction—and for child-serving systems, including more efficient use of resources and reduced out-of-home placements.



## Accessing PPS

Parent Peer Support services exist in every State, although the funding and intensity levels of services vary. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) deemed peer support services to be an evidence-based practice, and, therefore, a reimbursable service for States that choose to incorporate them into their State Medicaid plan. This guide provides practical guidance for States, providers, and advocates on implementing Medicaid-funded youth and family peer support services.

Casey Family Programs reviews how child welfare systems around the country have diversified funding sources (Medicaid, State funding, and grants) to pay for parent peer support. They also compile information about exemplar programs such as Iowa's Parent Partner Program and Washington's Parents for Parents.

Families can access PPS by contacting their local or state family-run organization (FRO) or by searching the National Peer Directory. **For information about PPS, visit the National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services' Knowledge Hub.**