

Peer Health Coaching

An overview

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What is Peer Health Coaching?

Peer Health Coaching was developed in response to the poor physical health and significantly-reduced life expectancy of people living with a mental illness, when compared to the general population.

Peer Health Coaching provides six one-hour sessions to support consumers who have identified a physical health goal they would like to work on as part of their recovery. It can be delivered as a one-on-one or group program.

‘People in our mental health services are dying up to 25 years earlier than the general population. Around 60% of these deaths are caused by preventable illness.’

Peer Health Coaching is an important complement to recovery-orientated practice, tapping into the unique qualities peers provide. They understand what it’s like to achieve health goals despite the challenges associated with having a mental illness.

Peer Health Coaching aims to improve the physical health outcomes of people living with mental illness by:

- exploring the person’s current circumstances and asking facilitative questions to better understand their health needs
- brainstorming a variety of options with the person for how to best achieve their health goal, while working with their strengths
- encouraging people to find their own solutions to health problems using coaching and motivational interviewing techniques, as opposed to counseling or advice
- supporting people to find and maintain the motivation and confidence required to achieve their goals
- identifying with the person’s strengths and values to move towards sustainable and meaningful change.

‘In many instances peer support is the first step consumers take in their health and wellbeing recovery’.

– Peer Health Coach
Project Worker, Neami National

Is Peer Health Coaching for everyone?

Before beginning Peer Health Coaching, people need to have a very clear health-related goal in mind and be ready to make the changes required. It is important to consider where the person is in relation to the *stages-of-change model*. This is a conversation that can be facilitated by the persons’ support worker. After this, if the person feels ready to make a physical health change, they can be referred to the Peer Health Coaching program.

Does Peer Health Coaching work?

SANE Australia partnered with Neami National to conduct a three-year pilot within their service sites, examining the effectiveness and impact of Peer Health Coaching on people’s health and wellbeing. The findings from the pilot were very positive, with participants reporting that Peer Health Coaching provided an opportunity to focus, to achieve, and to be inspired. As one participant said:

‘You need support as well . . . I lost a lot of weight with Peer Health Coaching because it was focused’

Peer Health Coaches reported that people had:

- started regular exercise independently
- tried new exercise
- started cooking meals independently
- lost weight
- requested a medication review which resulted in significant weight loss
- reduced number of cigarettes smoked
- felt confident to pursue their goals beyond the coaching sessions.

What makes Peer Health Coaching successful?

A supportive organisational culture around peer work and its value to mental health is imperative. This culture begins at the executive level with the CEO championing the program.

Peer Health Coaching requires a whole-of-service approach to support the successful integration of the initiative. It is crucial that key staff are engaged and support the program. Promoting to both staff and clients to generate excitement and interest is crucial.

During the SANE/NEAMI pilot, a steering committee was created with a representative from every level of staff involved. This received positive feedback from staff and clients, who appreciated being involved in the planning and decision-making process.

The most successful sites in the pilot were those that embraced and believed in the Peer Health Coaching program.

Who is involved?

Peer Health Coaches

The key workers in this program are experienced peer support workers who have been trained to become Peer Health Coaches. The role of a Peer Health Coach requires a comprehensive skillset with experience and knowledge of the following:

- coaching
- coordination between stakeholders
- engagement and relationship building with consumers
- trauma-informed practice
- recovery-orientated practice
- awareness and impact of disease, lifestyle choices and medication
- stigma and discrimination
- knowledge of services
- passion about physical health.

In order to have strong consistent knowledge of these issues, it is a prerequisite for peer support workers to have completed the *Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work*. In addition, it is recommended that Peer Health Coaches have at least six months experience working in your organisation to ensure induction training has been completed and the Peer Health Coach is familiar with your organisation.

Manager

It is essential to have a person in the organisation who is responsible for the ongoing management of the program and to supervise the Peer Health Coaches.

For larger organisations with several sites it may be useful to employ a Peer Health Coach Project Worker. This person can coordinate the Peer Health Coaches, liaise with their direct managers and keep the overall outcomes of the project on track. The role is ideal for someone with personal experience of mental illness, who understands the importance of peer support and who can provide mentoring and networking to other peer support workers.

For smaller organisations a single manager may take responsibility for the program and be a direct report for the Peer Health Coach.

The Manager is responsible for:

- achieving and evaluating the objectives of the Peer Health Coaching program
- coordination of referrals to the program
- support and leadership for the Peer Health Coaches.



'Peer Health Coaching works so well because it is embedded in our recovery framework. We value peer work and our whole site is interested in health'

– Neami Support Worker

How do I get Peer Health Coaching started in my organisation?

Peer Health Coaching requires strong commitment and support from an organisation. Integrating a new service into an existing system can be challenging and it requires hard work and resourcing. SANE can provide the resources you need.

SANE Peer Health Coaching Package

Part 1 Implementation Consultation

It is recommended that all organisations sending staff to Peer Health Coaching training, book an Implementation Consultation first. This one-on-one consultation between the SANE Peer Health Coaching Project Coordinator and the person managing Peer Health Coaching in the organisation, allows them to go through the *Peer Health Coaching Practice Manual*, and to discuss and tailor the implementation process to meet the organisations needs.

The Practice Manual covers the resources, staffing, training, promotion and evaluation requirements when putting Peer Health Coaching into operation.

Part 2 Peer Health Coaching Training

The two-day training package is intended for qualified Peer Support Workers. Whether you have an established peer workforce or you have recruited specifically for the program, the training will provide your peer staff with the necessary skills, knowledge and confidence to work as Peer Health Coaches.

Training Cost

\$600-\$800 per person depending on training location and travel costs incurred for trainers. Training includes two experienced trainers, catering and training resources.

To deliver the training, a minimum of eight participants need to be in attendance.

What next?

Community mental health organisations vary in size and the services they provide. Different organisations will be at different stages in their capacity to resource programs addressing both the mental and physical health and wellbeing of people affected by mental illness.

The Peer Health Coaching Checklist will assist in deciding the way ahead.

There are a number of other ways your organisation can get involved in supporting better physical health. The *SANE Healthy Living Guidelines* and *SANE Smokefree Guidelines* are great starting points. To learn more visit www.sane.org

Peer Health Coaching Checklist

1. Have you gauged staff and consumer interest in Peer Health Coaching?
 - a. Yes, they are interested in participating (Continue to Q2)
 - b. No. It is beneficial to have a chat with staff and consumers to gauge their interest and clarify any issues or concerns they may have.
2. Has management agreed and signed off on implementing Peer Health Coaching?
 - a. Yes, we have their full support (Continue to Q3)
 - b. No. Refer to the benefits covered in this overview of what Peer Health Coaching will bring to your organisation and highlight your consumer's interest and support in the initiative.
3. Does your organisation have an existing peer workforce?
 - a. Yes (Continue to Q4)
 - b. No. The Peer Health Coaching Package assumes that your organisation has an established peer workforce and the necessary training, supervision and support in place. Visit the Centre for Excellence in Peer Support, Starting a Peer Support Service or Group to download their three training modules.
4. Have the peer support staff intending to be trained in Peer Health Coaching, completed a Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work or equivalent training?
 - a. Yes (Continue to Q5)
 - b. No. There are a number of core principles that the peer support worker role requires to maintain the integrity of the position. It is expected that this knowledge base exists. Visit training.gov.au <http://training.gov.au/training/details/CHC42912>
5. Contact SANE Australia on 03 9682 5933 or info@sane.org to book an Implementation Consultation and discuss Peer Health Coaching Training for your organisation

SANE Australia

A national charity working for a better life for people affected by mental illness

www.sane.org

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SANE Australia, 2015

PDF version available at www.sane.org.

Visit the www.sane.org for more information about the SANE Mind + Body initiative and other healthy living resources for people living with mental illness.

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