

Medicaid Coverage of Family and Youth Peer Support

Strengthen Children's Behavioral Health Care by Expanding Staff with Lived Experience

Family Peer Support Specialists are caregivers with lived experience navigating behavioral health and related systems who are trained to support other families.

Youth Peer Support Specialists are young adults (18-29) with personal lived experience as children or youth receiving behavioral health or related services who are trained to support other youth.

Outcomes of Family and Youth Peer Support

Peer support work is anchored in shared lived experience, strategic sharing of personal story, and emotional support that offers a unique approach and benefit when integrated within prevention services or as a component of behavioral health interventions. **Research has demonstrated benefits to youth, families, and systems:**



Family Benefits¹

- Increased engagement in treatment and adherence to interventions
- Improved family functioning
- Reduced caregiver stress and isolation
- Greater confidence to navigate systems and meet children's needs
- More shared decision-making with providers



Youth Benefits²

- Increased engagement in treatment
- Greater trust of providers
- Improved social-emotional functioning
- Decreased conflict with parents and caregivers



System Benefits³

- Shorter hospital stays
- Reduced re-hospitalization and emergency room treatment rates
- Lowered costs
- Long-term opportunity to improve equity in service delivery, increase access, and decrease wait times

"You are a mom...and someone says, 'You know what, **I've been there. Let me help you.**'"
-Connecticut parent regarding family peer support

Connecticut Family and Youth Peer Support Research Project



Goal: Develop recommendations for Connecticut to expand family and youth peer support roles within the children's behavioral health workforce.



Research Questions:

- Literature on effectiveness?
- Best practices in implementation?
- Connecticut landscape?
- Funding and sustainability?



Builds Upon recommendation within Connecticut's strategic plan for the children's behavioral health workforce.



Methods:

- Literature review
- Landscape analysis of CT programs
- Key informant interviews
- Focus groups with families and providers
- Survey of peers and other staff

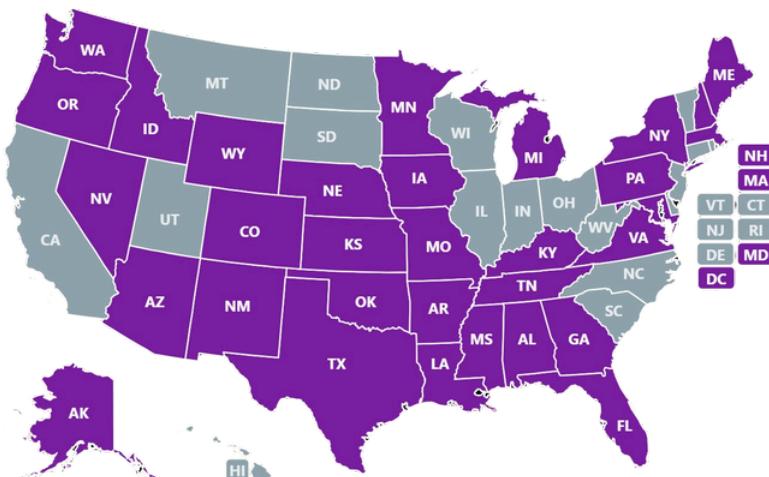
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Medicaid Funding for Family and Youth Peer Support: A National Perspective

Medicaid is a primary source of funding for most states' implementation of family and youth peer support. While many states braid funding across multiple sources, Medicaid serves as the most stable, sustainable source of funds for peer support. **The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services identifies family and youth peer support as evidence-based services** and an important component of a state's delivery of effective behavioral health services. Medicaid coverage can include **fee-for-service reimbursement, value-based payment methods, and waivers**.

33

states have Medicaid coverage
for family and/or youth peer
support services⁴



Connecticut Landscape

Connecticut currently has multiple programs implementing family peer support services (and very few youth peer support programs). These programs have very limited capacity in relation to the potential need among children and families receiving behavioral health services. **Connecticut family and youth peer support services are currently funded by a patchwork of funding mechanisms and have limited sustainability.**

There is **currently no Medicaid fee-for-service funding for family or youth peer support in Connecticut**. Innovative approaches to Medicaid funding, such as the 1115 substance use waiver and the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic planning grant, offer opportunities to explore alternative payment models for peer support, but are very limited in scope.

The Connecticut General Assembly, in recent years, has expanded Medicaid coverage for other non-clinical health care staff. **Public Act No. 23-247 expanded coverage to doulas and Public Act No. 23-186 expanded coverage to community health workers** (although funding for reimbursement has yet to be allocated for the latter).

Policy Recommendation

Change Connecticut Medicaid policy through a state plan amendment to allow reimbursement for services offered by family and youth peer support specialists:

- Include prevention, early intervention, and treatment services
- Cover the full continuum of care
- Peers should be self-identified as youth or caregivers/family members of youth who have experience with behavioral health needs
- Support family-run organizations, in addition to providers, to build capacity to bill Medicaid

¹Hoagwood, K.E., et al. (2010). ²Simmons, M.B., et al. (2023). Ojeda, V.D., et al. (2021). Vojtila, L, et al. (2021). Hawke, L.D., et al. (2019).

³Mental Health America (2019). Ojeda, V.D., et al. (2021). ⁴Schober, M. and Baxter, K. SAMHSA (2020). *Data current as of Apr. 2020.