

OptumHealth Pierce Regional Support Network and Recovery Innovations

Peer Bridger Program

Description: OptumHealth Pierce Regional Support Network and Recovery Innovations provides services to uninsured and Medicaid beneficiaries in Tacoma, Washington. OptumHealth Pierce Regional Support Network utilizes “Peer Bridgers” to provide in-home and community support to program members. In addition to helping to bridge community services for Medicaid members, the program supports non-Medicaid individuals transitioning from an inpatient setting to the community and supports them in applying for Medicaid. Peer Bridgers have a lived experience of mental health conditions and recovery and can uniquely relate to many of the challenges individuals may be experiencing. Peer Bridgers link participants to community, recovery and wellness supports in an effort to increase self-empowerment and hope, improve personal success and adjustment to the community, assist eligible individuals in obtaining benefits, and reduce the need to return to inpatient services.

Key Objectives:

- To reduce mental health-related preventable hospital admissions
- To enhance care coordination by using peers and other non-physician providers

Actions Taken: Peer Bridgers receive special recovery model training which provide them with tools to help themselves and others on their recovery journey. The Peer Bridger helps to foster hope and serves as an advocate, role model and mentor assisting individuals coming out of inpatient services in becoming engaged in a broad range of community-based and natural supports. As a result of their shared experiences, Peer Bridgers and individuals are able to create a mutually supportive relationship based on trust and respect. Through this special relationship, individuals feel understood and empowered to express their needs and drive their own person-centered recovery plan. Peer Bridgers assist individuals by teaching and role modeling wellness management skills, coping skills, independent living skills and social skills. Peer Bridgers engage individuals during hospitalization and discuss with the participant what the immediate needs are to successfully manage their recovery. The Peer Bridger also assists individuals in accessing available resources for an average of 14 days post-discharge. These resources include but are not limited to temporary/permanent housing; accessing primary care services and needed medications; recovery and social support groups; shopping for groceries; etc. The Peer Bridger program relies on the peer-to-peer relationship to increase a person’s sense of connectedness to their community. Services empower and educate individuals to allow each person to move forward in their recovery, while providing a safety net should they feel like they need additional supports to successfully adjust and remain in the community.

Outcomes: We have served 113 individuals since July 2010 and those unique individuals had 137 hospitalizations from July 2009 to prior to entering the Peer Bridger Program. Since entering the program, those unique individuals have had only 21 hospital admissions to-date.

Geographic Location: Case study program was conducted in Tacoma, Washington.