

Vermont's Opiate Problem

We start from the premise that our visitors are in recovery when they say they are. Vermont recovery centers are seeing increasing numbers of visitors looking for physicians who can prescribe Buprenorphine or methadone. These visitors report that they are in recovery, but are buying Buprenorphine on the street until they can find a willing physician. This era is bringing new people into our recovery centers who are looking to avoid the discomfort of withdrawal symptoms. Unfortunately, in many cases they have not yet made a personal commitment to medication compliance or giving up the use of alcohol and other drugs.

We are committed to making recovery available to all who seek help and support in changing their lives, but *we need to maintain safe, supportive environments for people on ALL paths to recovery*. The influx of opiate users at the beginning of their recovery journey has made it imperative that we have **trained recovery workers on site every hour a center is open to keep our centers safe**. We need more trained staff to respond to the complex needs of these visitors, while supporting our volunteer workforces.

Pathways to Recovery

As a result of our demonstrated success in providing recovery supports, the VT Recovery Network received Federal funding to implement a pilot project, Pathways to Recovery, which will provide support for Vermonters in opiate treatment. People in opiate treatment have not had consistent access to welcoming peer recovery groups and recovery support services. All of Vermont's recovery centers now have ½ time recovery workers, working with opiate treatment providers and receiving referrals for one-on-one support and facilitated peer recovery support groups hosted in our recovery centers.

This limited funding was targeted for increasing staff time at each participating center in order to demonstrate the benefit of expanding the use of peer recovery support for people suffering from this chronic disease. Vermont centers are stretching already-tight budgets to support them. These experts on the recovery process will also support people entering centers seeking help for opiate addiction, but their limited time for accomplishing our grant objectives prevents them from providing a solution for our general staffing needs.

Our experience with providing recovery support has demonstrated that recovery centers help visitors reduce recidivism and become productive members of their communities. We have learned that our approach to providing information and peer support for people suffering from addictive disease helps them take responsibility for managing their lives with this chronic health condition – just as people with diabetes, asthma or heart problems have traditionally benefitted from information and targeted recovery support. Our Pathway Guides will function as ambassadors of recovery and help people in medication-assisted treatment to develop their own vision of how their lives could become more comfortable and satisfying in ongoing recovery. We help people regain their enthusiasm for life.

We have already developed introductions to various recovery approaches such as: All Recovery meetings, Making Recovery Easier groups, and our pilot Recovery is the Solution groups, which answer the question, “Why would I want recovery?” These groups are being held in recovery centers in order to introduce participants to others in recovery, helping them to create their own webs of recovery support.

The Pathways to Recovery project will make it possible for our team to refine these recovery approaches, while working with those providing medication assisted treatment. Guides will coordinate with treatment professionals to determine mutually agreeable ways to introduce people in treatment to personally directed recovery approaches. Many providers and centers have regularly scheduled visits where center representatives introduce themselves and the recovery supports available in recovery centers to treatment clients. Increased staff support will allow us to expand these efforts.