

Support Services for Recovery



While you receive treatment

for a mental illness, it's also important that you

take advantage of other supports to rebuild and enrich your life. This fact sheet covers four key services – peer support, employment, housing, and education – that can help you pursue your goals and feel included in society.

Peer Support

Like many people, you may feel that the stigma and shame connected to having a mental illness is worse than the illness itself. Also, you may find it hard to talk to some friends and family who don't fully understand what you're experiencing. So, it's important that you find people and places where you can feel comfortable sharing your experiences, without worrying if you will be judged.

Talking with other people who have been through what you're going through can help you deal with the stress and feelings of 'being alone.' These peers can give you coping tips, let you know about respectful treatment resources in your community, and provide support to help you make your own decisions in life.

Where can I find peer support in my area?

- Drop-in centers and clubhouses are a good source of peer support. They are often open during the day and on evenings, weekends and holidays, when professional services are usually closed.

- You should also take advantage of any self-help or support groups at local hospitals or community centers. Some groups are formed around a particular diagnosis, such as schizophrenia; others may be specific to men or women.
- If you are working with a professional treatment team, there might be a peer specialist who can share his or her perspective with you. Peer specialists are also employed as counselors, job coaches, case managers, drop-in center staff, outreach workers and housing assistants.

Employment

Maybe you were working and had to leave a job when your mental illness began. Or maybe, you've never been in the workforce. Either way, you now want to get a job. Working and getting paid can be a big boost to your recovery, helping you pay bills and giving you a sense of pride and belonging. But, you may be wondering, "Who will hire me?" "How can I deal with my illness and make a living at the same time?"

As you aim for this goal, keep in mind that people with mental illness, like you, can make and are making valuable contributions in workplaces throughout the country. Though some employers may make you feel unwelcome, others are accepting of workers with psychiatric disabilities.

How do I begin to get back to work?

- Contact your community mental health organizations or local government to see what they offer for job training, placement, vocational skills or other employment services.
- Ask them how you can receive a new type of employment services called supported employment. These services can provide you with ongoing support during a job search and throughout your time on a job. Supported employment usually involves placement in competitive jobs that are based on your preferences and skills, and in workplaces in which people with and without disabilities work together.

- If you're receiving SSI or other government benefits, make sure to check how a paying job will affect your status. Ask about a new government program, called Ticket to Work that is helping people like you to have a job and keep their health benefits.
- Also, keep in mind that to find a job you need to have an address and phone number, proper clothing and, often, transportation.

Housing

Having a safe and secure place to live is an important part of your recovery. You also may need to have access to some services to live as independently as possible. Most people with mental illnesses can and do live independently in apartments or in their own homes.

What housing options are there?

- Contact your local mental health organizations to see what housing options are available in your community.
- One option, called supported housing, includes apartments, condominiums and single-family homes where you can live and provides support services, usually at another location.
- Another housing type, called supportive housing, usually features individual rental apartments in one location that are restricted to people who meet certain criteria. For example, the apartments may be available only to people who are homeless and have a mental illness. While you should have access to crisis support services throughout the day and night, these services may not be available onsite.

Education

You may have had to put off your education as a result of your mental illness, but may now be ready to resume your studies to reach your long-range goals.

How can I return to school?

- Contact the office of disability services at potential colleges to see what services they offer for students with psychiatric disabilities.
- Some schools or rehabilitation programs offer supported education services. The services can help you navigate the application process, deal with any stigma or discrimination, develop studying skills and sometimes pay for school.
- If paying for school is an issue, you might be eligible for financial assistance. Some scholarship programs are also available to help students with psychiatric disabilities stay in school. Talk with the schools' offices of financial assistance.

For more information, contact your local Mental Health Association (MHA) or the National Mental Health Association at 800-969-NMHA (6642) or www.nmha.org.



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