



Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

# What is a Peer Support Specialist?

## Department of Veterans Affairs

In VHA, PSs [peer support specialists] are VA employees who help Veterans with serious mental illnesses and substance use disorders to successfully engage in their treatment. Peer Specialists promote recovery by sharing their own recovery stories, providing encouragement, instilling a sense of hope, and teaching skills to Veterans. These services are provided by an appropriately qualified, VA-employed Peer Specialist.

## Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA)

A peer provider (e.g., certified peer specialist, recovery coach) is a person who uses his or her lived experience of recovery from a mental illness and/or addiction, plus skills learned in formal training to deliver services in behavioral health settings to promote mind-body recovery and resiliency.

## PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST FACTS



have unique certification requirements to work as a peer support specialist



provide Medicaid reimbursement for services delivered by a peer support specialist<sup>1</sup>



Peer support services significantly increase individuals' abilities to manage their symptoms and reduce their reliance on formal services while still achieving positive recovery outcomes<sup>2</sup>

# MENTAL HEALTH STATISTICS

## VETERAN FACTS

16.8

the average number of veterans who die by suicide each day (of those, 11 are not in VA care)<sup>3</sup>

18%

deaths by suicide of individuals over 65<sup>4</sup>

50%

of veterans are 65 and older<sup>5</sup>

2012

Executive Order directs the hiring of **800 peer specialists** at VA health facilities

2018

The PEER Act mandates a pilot program to employ peer support specialists at up to **30 demonstration sites** within patient aligned care teams

2020

**41% increase** in the number of peer support specialists working at VA facilities over the last 8 years

## SENIOR FACTS

2+ MILLION

seniors live with depression<sup>6</sup>

The majority of older adults who die by suicide were seen by a primary care physician within the past week or month<sup>8</sup>



50% HIGHER

Cost of health care for seniors experiencing depression compared to those who are not<sup>7</sup>

## MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE SHORTAGE FACTS

111 MILLION

Americans live in mental health professional shortage areas<sup>9</sup>

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## Citations

<sup>1</sup> GAO-19-41 Peer Support Programs

<sup>2</sup> Sledge WH, Lawless M, Sells D. Effectiveness of peer support in reducing readmissions among people with multiple psychiatric hospitalizations. *Psychiatry Serv.* 2011;62:541–544

<sup>3</sup> United States Department of Veterans Affairs

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<sup>5</sup> United States Department of Veterans Affairs

<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<sup>7</sup> Unutzer, J., "Depressive symptoms and the cost of health services in HMO patients aged 65 years and older" *JAMA* 277;20

<sup>8</sup> Cornwell et al. *J. American Geriatrics Society*, Ahmedani et. Al., *J. Gen Intl Med.* 2014

<sup>9</sup> United States Department of Health and Human Services