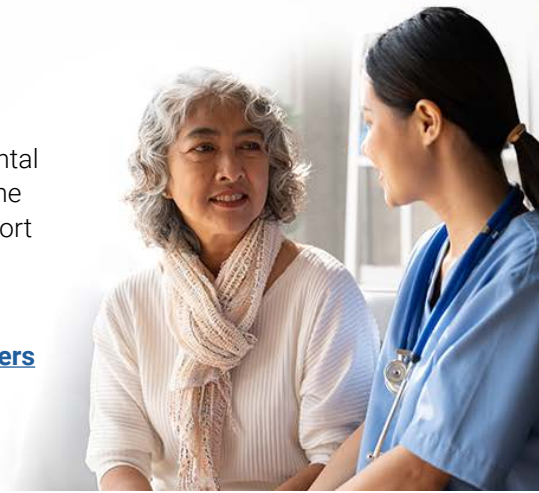


In This Issue

Peer support plays a valuable role in the recovery of individuals living with mental illness and substance use disorders. Peer support can be engaged in several ways, including group support formats, online support groups, phone-delivered peer interventions, and trained peer support services. A “certified peer specialist” refers to a person who has lived experience with a mental health diagnosis and is trained to deliver peer support services to individuals with similar mental health diagnoses. Those who seek to become Certified Older Adult Peer Specialists (COAPS) receive special training as well (for more information on [COAPS training, please visit the Penn Collaborative for CBT and Implementation Science website](#)). Peer support workers also play an important role in supporting emotional well-being for those living with dementia and their caregivers. Similar to certified mental health peer specialists, dementia peer supporters share a common lived experience, whether it be someone who has an early diagnosis of dementia or someone who is, or was, a caregiver trained to provide support. Peer supporters can help enhance feelings of emotional connection through shared experiences and help share new ways to cope, as well as facilitate continued engagement in care from a licensed clinician.

While a fair amount of research has been done examining peer support in those with mental illness, a very small proportion of this work has focused on older adults. In this issue of the E4 Center’s Hot Topics Newsletter, we highlight the latest research focused on peer support in older adults, particularly support services offered by trained peer support specialists.

The E4 Center now provides useful training and resources for those interested in peer support work. Please see our [NEW written resources](#) and a [webinar about peer supporters](#) who work with older adults on the E4 Center website.



Peer support for Older Adults and Caregivers

[Certified Older Adult Peer Support Specialist-Delivered Telephonic Self-management Intervention in a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Population with Serious Mental Illness](#)

American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry. December, 2024

Fortuna and colleagues report feasibility, acceptability, and preliminary effectiveness data on their randomized controlled pilot study examining a certified older adult peer support specialist-delivered telephone intervention. Forty-two older adults with serious mental illness were randomized into the Supporting Older Adults Remotely (SOAR) intervention or to the peer support as usual control group. Their results demonstrate high feasibility and acceptability of the SOAR intervention. The SOAR group demonstrated increased independent living skills at six-month follow-up while the control group did not. The SOAR group also had higher medication adherence at follow-up. Both groups demonstrated improved self-efficacy for managing health conditions and psychiatric self-management.

[Usability, Acceptability, and Preliminary Effectiveness of a Peer-Delivered and Technology-Supported Mental Health Intervention for Family Caregivers of People with Dementia: Field Usability Study](#)

JMIR Human Factors. May, 2024

Collins-Pisano and colleagues describe a tech-based, caregiver-delivered peer support program addressing caregiver mental health. Three former dementia caregivers were trained to support nine current caregivers using the Caregiver Remote Education and Support (CARES) app. The CARES app was adapted from a well-established peer support app developed and used by certified peer specialists, home health aides, and certified older adult peer specialists. They found that training former caregivers to deliver peer support via the CARES app was feasible and acceptable. Current caregivers rated the usability of the CARES app as above average while caregiver supporters rated it as marginally usable. Non-statistically significant improvements in burden, stress, and strain were observed.

Impact of an Intergenerational Program to Improve Loneliness and Social Isolation in Older Adults Initiated at the Time of Emergency Department Discharge: Study Protocol for a Three-arm Randomized Clinical Trial

Trials. June, 2024

Zheng and colleagues describe their randomized clinical trial targeting social isolation and loneliness (SIL) in older adults discharged from the emergency department. Their “HOW R U?” intervention involves telephone follow-up from trained peer support volunteers and has demonstrated reduced SIL in older adults. In the current trial, three interventions will be delivered: (1) a standard same-generation peer support HOW R U? intervention, (2) HOW R U? delivered by intergenerational volunteers, and (3) a waitlist control group. SIL, depression, quality of life, functional status, generativity, and perceived benefit will be assessed at 12 weeks and 24 weeks post-intervention. They hypothesize that the intergenerational intervention will yield improved outcomes compared to the control group and peer-delivered intervention, particularly in those older adults who report high levels of generativity.

A Core Competency Framework for Mental Health Peer Supporters of Older Adults in a Chinese Community: Cross-culturally Informed Delphi Study

BJ Psych Bulletin. April, 2024

Wong and colleagues report results of a Delphi study with peer supporters, service users, and mental health professionals to develop core competencies for peer supporters in the Chinese context. They also draw comparisons from the Western context. Thirty-five core competencies were identified in their framework in five categories, including (1) self-care and self-development, (2) general work ethics, (3) work with others, (4) work with service users, and (5) peer support knowledge. Although many competencies between the Chinese and Western contexts overlap, there were some aspects of peer support that were more important in each cultural context. In the Chinese context, peer supporters were generally valued as “generic support companions” whereas aspects such as providing role-modeling were less important as compared to the Western context.

Peer Support Workers as an Innovative Force in Advocacy in Dementia Care: A Transnational Project Delivered in Norway, Greece, Italy, and Romania

Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare. July, 2024

Tsatali and colleagues highlight the role of peer support workers in dementia care as a valuable source of practical and emotional support in managing caregiving challenges and learning coping strategies. They describe the “Peer Support Workers (PSW) as an Innovative Force in Advocacy in Dementia Care” (PIA) Project that involved developing sustainable services across four countries with special attention to specific national priorities. The authors describe the development of training material and protocols that were delivered to fifty potential peer support workers. A digital platform was created to disseminate PIA training material and to promote peer support workers in dementia care.

A Mixed Methods Effectiveness Study of a Peer Support Intervention for Older Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Results of a Randomized Clinical Trial

American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry. October, 2024

Joo and colleagues report their results from a mixed-methods, single-blind randomized controlled trial examining the effect of a peer support intervention aimed at reducing depression in older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. The PEERS intervention is a phone-based social support intervention delivered by trained peers and focuses on social support, coping skills, behavior change, and community and service connection. This was compared to a social interaction control group which was also delivered via phone, but by non-peer trained callers. Their results suggested that both groups experienced improved outcomes related to depression, loneliness, self-efficacy, and active coping. Qualitative results suggest that older adults in the PEERS intervention learned coping skills and demonstrated behavior change, whereas the control group reported a generally positive experience.

Upcoming Events

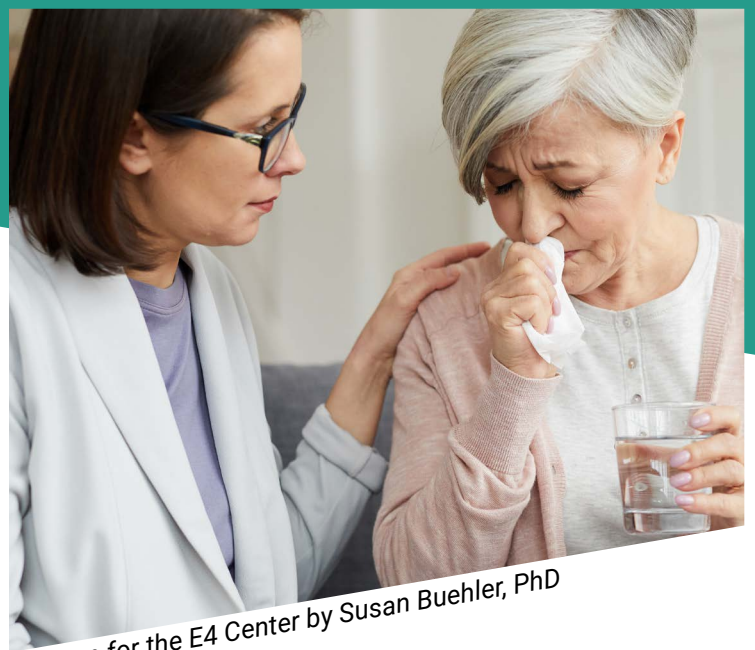
You can register for these events or learn more by going to our website at e4center.org/calendar

MARCH

Sleep and Insomnia in Older Adults

Speaker: Jennifer L. Martin, PhD, FAASM

March 5th from 10-11:30AM PT / 11AM-12:30PM MT / 12-1:30PM CT / 1-2:30PM ET



Written for the E4 Center by Susan Buehler, PhD