Framework for Change: The Policy Cycle

The following sections of this guide provide information about how to get started on your policy change agenda, along with links to online guides that address policy change issues in detail. We have created a fictitious example about a Youth M.O.V.E. chapter that is working to get more and better peer support in its state. We call the peer support initiative "Building Peer Support," or BUILD-PS for short. Throughout the rest of this guide the goal of increasing high quality peer support is used as an example to discuss policy change skills and strategies. Whenever we refer to this example, we will use this symbol so you know we are talking about this "made up" policy change effort:

Following is some background information for the BUILD-PS example, and then we will turn to the topic of "how to change policy."

Peer support background

Although there is much enthusiasm for peer support as a helpful source of personal support, information and connections to needed resources, youth peer support is not available to all who might benefit from this service. A wide variety of policy-related issues may come together to restrict access to peer support, including:

· **Questions about the value of peer support among service providers and funders.** Youth M.O.V.E. National provides a review of the literature about youth peer-to-peer support that addresses some of these issues at http://www.youthmovenational.org/images/downloads/YouthPeertoPeerLiteratureReviewFINAL.pdf.[4]

Information about research on peer support is also available on the Pathways website[5] at https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/proj-5-AMP-peer-support-faq.pdf and at https://pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu;[6]

- **Not enough trained peer support providers.** There are numerous training materials and workshops about peer support provided by youth and young adults, but

  » They are not available in all communities, and;

  » There is not yet enough evaluation of how well they work. Some evaluation of peer support training for young people has been done in Australia[7] (http://www.cyh.com/library/Mental_Health_Project.pdf);

- **Peer support is often provided by volunteers who have lived experience but who may not be trained or have access to supervision and support;**

- **Peer support services are better developed in the adult mental health field than for youth and young adult services**. Sometimes mental health administrators assume that the roles and training for adult peer support specialists can be directly applied to youth and young adults;

- **Lack of funding.** The availability of funding for peer support differs from state-to-state and across communities. States vary in their investment in peer support as a service, and in how the state Medicaid plan and other sources of state or county funding are structured.

Developing more and better peer support resources may call for a change in one or more existing policies, or for a new policy. The following discussion of the steps in the policy process uses the BUILD-PS policy change example, and proposes some ideas about how to approach each step.

BUILD-PS

Peer Support – *Peer support services are a promising practice that is widely accepted by young people, and has received increasing attention and support in the mental health system in recent years. Peer support specialists are young people who have experienced mental health challenges, who have learned how to get the services they needed. Peer support specialists often help other youth and young adults set goals, and get the help and support they need. Peer support providers are often able to communicate with youth who have serious mental health conditions because of their own unique perspectives and life experiences. Peer support services are not formal mental health services, but they do help build a bridge to help young people get access to the professional help they need. There are not enough services in all states and communities because there are not enough trained youth peer support providers, and many states have not yet found ways to pay for this service.*