

What is Mental Health Recovery?

And the Action Agenda to Transform VA Mental Health Services

A fact sheet from the VISN-5 MIRECC by A.. Lucksted, PhD
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A deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills, and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life even with limitations caused by the illness.

Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness.

W. Anthony, 1993

Nationally, VA mental health services are working to embody a Recovery Model of serving veterans with mental illnesses – through changes in clinical services, education, and research and by involving veterans with mental illnesses, their family members and friends, and mental health staff in these new efforts.

These changes are prompted by the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (2003) and the VA Action Agenda ("Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in the VA") that resulted from it. A number of national VA committees have been meeting to enact this agenda. Their recommendations have been submitted to national bodies in the VA, with accompanying mandates and performance measures to be determined. In the coming months we will all continue to see and hear about initiatives regarding mental health recovery.

In many ways, VA mental health services already are "recovery oriented" – but we can do so much more to help veterans reach their goals and optimal health. Specific local initiatives will vary according to what VISN 5 mental health administration, staff, veterans, and their families decide to prioritize --as well as central mandates.

Mental health recovery is a journey of healing and transformation for a person with a mental health disability to be able to live a meaningful life in communities of his or her choice while striving to achieve full human potential or "personhood."

SAMHSA, 2005 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

What do Recovery-Oriented Mental Health Services Look Like?

According to SAMHSA (2005) and others, recovery-oriented mental health services hold as a core value that people with mental illnesses are not defined by their illness and can live rich satisfying lives.

Such programs and services...

- View the veteran as the center of the process, and foster empowerment
- Respect and include the veteran and involved family members as partners in treatment / services
- Recognize that recovery is a dynamic process that the veteran pursues over time

- Seek to restore hope and return of functioning
- Value self-help and peer support
- Work to maximize quality of life
- Help the veteran move forward toward his/her goals, not focusing only on symptom stabilization
- Employ staff who treat the veteran with respect, believe in the veteran as a person with potential, and express hope and optimism for the recovery process.
- See also: <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/sma05-4129/>

Why is a Recovery Model Important?

- Traditional models of care have often been paternalistic and often have not respected nor engaged with veterans' strengths, preferences, and goals.
- Traditional models of care have often failed to consider the potential of each person to grow, to reach goals, to live a meaningful life.
- Recovery-oriented care may be more effective, show better outcomes
- Veterans and their family members are calling for a true working partnership with providers

Resources Regarding the Recovery Model of Mental Health Services

VISN-5 MIRECC

We offer trainings, consultation, information and a seed money fund for recovery-fostering initiatives, available to any mental health related unit in the VISN. Please contact us!

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Government-Affiliated

Nat'l Recovery Consensus Statement: <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/sma05-4129/>

President's New Freedom Commission: <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov/reports/reports.htm>

SAMHSA's Nat'l Transformation Agenda: http://www.samhsa.gov/Federalactionagenda/NFC_TOC.aspx

Veteran MH Recovery Website sponsored by VISN 1 MIRECC: <http://www.veteranrecovery.org/>

B.U. Center for Psychiatric Rehab. Recovery Resources: <http://www.bu.edu/cpr/repository/index.html>

Surgeon General's M.H. Report: <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/home.html#preface>

Non-Government / Private Non-profit

The National Empowerment Center: <http://www.power2u.org/>

National Consumer Self Help Clearing House: <http://www.mhselfhelp.org/>

Peer to Peer Resource Center: <http://www.peersupport.org/>

HOPE Website: <http://www.mhrecovery.com/>

Recovery is variously called a process, an outlook, a vision, a guiding principle... the overarching message is that hope and restoration of a meaningful life are possible, despite serious mental illness... Instead of focusing primarily on symptom relief, as the medical model dictates, recovery casts a much wider spotlight on restoration of self-esteem and identity and on attaining meaningful roles in society.

Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General, Chapter 2, 1999